Incorporating Worlds of IF

75¢ MARCH 1975 14155 S*M

# Galaxy

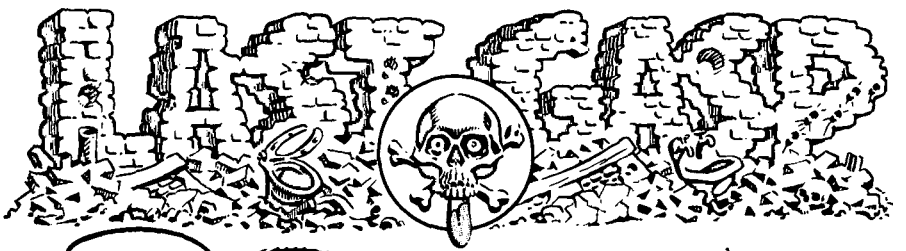
SCIENCE FICTION

*ARSEN DARNAY*
THE POLITICS OF RATTICIDE
*SPIDER ROBINSON*
NOBODY LIKES TO BE LONELY

ROGER ZELAZNY

TUTTLE DEL REY POURNELLE
EISENSTEIN STURGEON

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Thank you Galaxy Readers! Due to your overwhelming response to our previous ad, we are happy to announce 14 new prepaid economy packages of underground comix. You will receive the best art and story telling of today at prices you can afford. Careful selection of the right packages will mean hours of reading pleasure. We believe these adult stories are what you have been waiting for. Just check the package(s) you want and send cash, check or M.O. and a statement of your age (you must be 18 to order these comix) to our address, and presto! ! ! your mind will be blown . . . .

**A. SCIENCE FICTION:** Slow Death 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (.75 ea.); American 1. 2. **$5.25** Brain Fantasy.

**B. SPINE TINGLING HORROR:** Deviant Slice; Insect Fear 3; **$5.00** Legion of Charlies; Psychotic Adventures 1; Skull 2, 3, 4, 5 (.75 ea)

**C. FABLES & HERESIES:** Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin **$5.75** Mary (.75); Fantagor 3 ($1); Grim Wit 2 ($1); Tales from the Leather Nun (.75); Spasm (.75); Star Reach (.75).

**D. GRAPHIC NOVELS:** Grim Wit 1 (.75); Image of the Beast **$6.25** (.75); Psychotic Adventures 2 (.75); Inner City Romance 2 (.75); Dr. Atomic 2 (.75); Harold Hedd 2 (.75); Armorkins; Skull 6 (.75); Two Fisted Zombies.

**E. COMIX BY WOMEN:** Wimmen's Comix 1, 2; Wimmen's **$5.75** Comix 3 (.75); Pudge (.75); Tits & Clits; Abortion Eve; Pandora's Box; Manhunt; Girlfight 1, 2 (.75).

**F. HARD HITTING HUMOR & SATIRE:** Dopin Dan 3 (.75); Dr. **$5.00** Atomic 1 (.75); Harold Hedd 1 ($1.25); Big League Laffs; Short Order; Bijou 8 (.75); Green Dinosaur 2.

**G. SEXY STORIES FOR NEOPHYTES & LIBERTINES:** Armaged- **$6.00** don 1 (.75); Armageddon 3 ($1); Good Jive 1; Facts O'Life; Eternal Tales; Hot Crackers; Young Lust 3 ($1); Sex and Affection. Pork (.75).

**H. 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's (you name it) NOSTALGIA PACKAGE:** **$4.25** Greaser 2; Hungry Chuck Biscuits; Corn Fed 1; Merton of the Movement; Laugh in the Dark; Lean Years: High School/Mountain; Bakersfield (.75).

**I. COLLECTOR'S ROBERT CRUMB:** Peoples; Artistic (.75); XYZ; **$4.25** Mr. Natural 1; Black & White; Big Ass 2; Despair; Uneeda.

**J. EC REPRINTS:** Shock Suspense 12; Haunt of Fear 12; Weird **$7.00** Fantasy 13; Crime Suspense 25; Vault of Horror 26; Shock Suspense 6; Two Fisted Tales 34.

**K. RECENT RELEASES:** Eight of our most recent publications. **$5.00** Guaranteed quality— get them as they come off the presses.

**L. SUPER COLLECTOR'S PACKAGE:** All of the above comix **$35.00** (except K, M & N). Over 80 comix, a value of $51.00 for only $35.00.

**M. FREAK BROTHERS & WONDER WARTHOG:** Freak Brothers **$3.25** 1, 2, 3, (.60 ea.); Wonder Warthog 1, 3; Feds 'n Heads.

**N. COMPLETE ZAP COLLECTION:** Zap 0, 1 (.50 ea.); Zap 2, 3, **$5.50** 4, 5, 6, 7. (.75 ea).

I am 18 years of age or over.

NAME_____ ADDRESS _____

(Signature) _____

STORES: We offer 40% off retail value on orders over 200 comix. Send for our free catalogue today. Substitutions of high quality will be made. All comix are 50 cents unless otherwise noted. You may order single copies if you add 20 cents each for postage and handling.

**LAST GASP ECO-FUNNIES—1274 FOLSOM STREET—SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103**

**TESTING CONCEPTUAL LIMITS SINCE 1970**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR LAST CHANCE GALAXY READERS

Effective with the April issue, GALAXY's subscription rates will go to $12.00 per year and its newsstand price will be increased to $1.00 per issue.

This is a step we must take, reluctantly, to meet dramatic new increases in paper costs and printing prices, as well as recent scheduled new increases in postage.

For a very limited time, we are offering our readers and subscribers an opportunity to enter new subscriptions or extend existing subscriptions at the current selling price of $7.50 per year. By acting now, while the current low subscription rates are still in effect, you can save $4.50 per year over the new prices. And protect yourself against any possible future rate increases, throughout the life of your subscription.

So don't miss out on this chance to beat the coming price rise. And if you send us your order now, you won't miss out on the big things that are planned! Fantastic minds to be encountered...tripping out among the stars...extrapolations of present day situations, problems, policies and cultural trends. All brewed in the fertile imaginations of the likes of Asimov, Clarke, Shaw, Zelazny, Pangborn, Pohl, Williamson.

## RENEW, EXTEND OR ENTER A NEW SUBSCRIPTION WITH THIS COUPON...AND SAVE $4.50 OVER THE NEW PRICES.

GALAXY MAGAZINE
350 Kennedy Drive
Hauppauge, New York 11787

YES, I want to beat the coming price rise and protect myself against any future increases, for the term indicated below:

☐ 1 year, $7.50 (a saving of $4.50 over the new price)
☐ 2 years, $15.00 (a saving of $9.00 over the new price)

☐ Extend or renew my current subscription
☐ This is a new subscription

My payment of $_____ is enclosed.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____ ZIP_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

March 1975
Vol. 36, No. 3

# Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION
MAGAZINE

Arnold E. Abramson, *Publisher*
James Baen, *Editor* — Theodore Sturgeon, *Contributing Editor*
L. C. Murphy, *Subscriptions* — Jerry Pournelle, Ph. D., *Science Editor*
John Wright, *Advertising Manager* — Jay Tunick, *Circulation Director*

***NOVELETTES***

**THE POLITICS OF RATTICIDE,** Arsen Darnay ..... **16**
*In which a group of teenies on a Time Ark are regaled with the exploits of the Taler's intrepid ancestors. But be warned; if sex and violence offend you, so will the Taler's grandfather!*

**NOBODY LIKES TO BE LONELY,** Spider Robinson ..... **113**
*Spider is one of the two co-winners of this year's John W. Campbell Award for Best New SF Writer. This story, his first contribution to* Galaxy, *will show you why.*

***SHORT STORIES***

**IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE,** Steve Carper ..... **7**
*A science fiction story about a science fiction magazine. Any resemblances between the staid and proper real world of sf publishing and this ridiculous story are categorically denied! After all, this is Steve Carper's first published sf story–so how could he possibly know?!*

**CHANGELINGS,** Lisa Tuttle ..... **58**
*A genuinely scary story of the near future when Decency and The American Way have become synonymous. Ms. Tuttle is this year's other Campbell Award recipient.*

**TREE OF LIFE,** Phyllis Eisenstein ..... **144**
*In which all that stands between Earth and an Alien Menace is a single mulberry tree–a tree in grave danger of being chopped down!*

***SERIAL***

**SIGN OF THE UNICORN,** Roger Zelazny ..... **81**
*Continuing the adventures of Corwin of Amber. In this installment he makes a shocking discovery about the nature of the Universe. . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

***FEATURES***

**THE EDITOR'S PAGE** ..... 6
*This editorial is directed not so much to readers as to writers of science fiction. It is an adjuration against gloom and doom, and whimpering despair: Introducing the Next Phase!*

**A STEP FARTHER OUT,** Jerry Pournelle ..... 50
***ABM, MISSILE EATING LASERS AND A BI-POLAR WORLD***—*You can forward a copy of this article to your Senator or Congressman by simply addressing it to: The Hon. (name), The Capitol, Washington, D.C. And you should!*

**FORUM,** Lester del Rey ..... 69
***THE SIREN SONG OF ACADEME***—*Wherein Lester takes exception to those who would dissolve sf into the Mainstream of Literary Values.*

**SHOWCASE,** Stephen Fabian ..... 151
*A non verbal series.*

**BOOKSHELF**, Theodore Sturgen ..... 152
*Sturgeon reviews what he considers to be the best science fiction novel ever written!*

**DIRECTIONS** ..... 156
*Letters from Rea, Meyer, Grimshawe, Isdale, Miliken.*

*Cover by Freff, from SIGN OF THE UNICORN*
*Interior Illustrations by Freff, Fabian, Gaughan*

**GALAXY, Incorporating *Worlds of If* is published monthly by UPD Publishing Corporation, a subsidiary of Universal Publishing & Distributing Corporation. Arnold E. Abramson, President. Main Offices: 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Single copy: 75c. 12-issue subscription: $9.00 in U.S., $10.00 elsewhere.**

**GALAXY, Incorporating *Worlds of If* is published in the United Kingdom by Universal-Tandem Publishing Company, Ltd., 14 Gloucester Road, London SW7 4RD. Arnold E. Abramson, Chairman of the Board. Ralph Stokes, Managing Director. Single copy: 30p. 12-issue subscription in the United Kingdom: p4.20.**

**Copyright © 1975 by UPD Publishing Corporation under International, Universal and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and additional mailing offices. The publishers assume no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in U.S.A.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

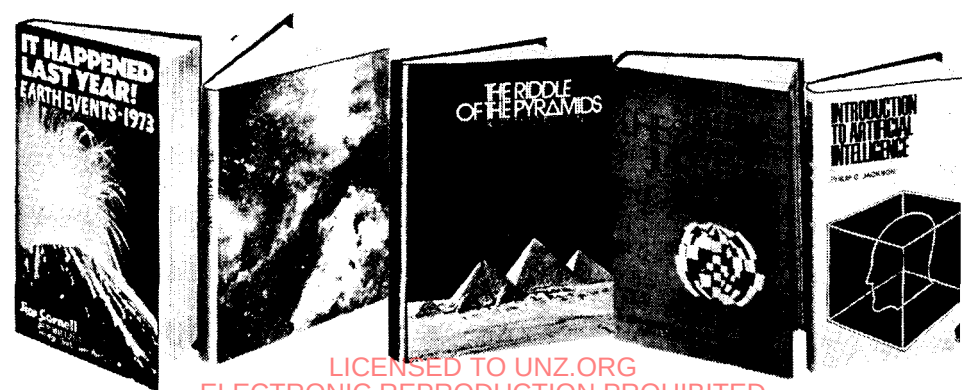
# What's new in the lives of bees...the minds of dolphins ...artificial intelligence. astrophysics.

To keep up with everything that's happening in every scientific area that interests you...Take any 3 books (values to $55.00) all for only $3.95...

as a member of

# The Library of Science.

if you join now and agree to accept only 3 more books —all at member discount— over the next two years




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Retail prices shown)

**73330. A RANDOM WALK IN SCIENCE.** *Compiled by Robert L. Weber and Eric Mendoza.* A collection of jokes, short essays and poems on humor and humanity in physics and related sciences. **$12.50**

**56600. IT HAPPENED LAST YEAR.** *James Cornell.* Over 200 stranger-than-science-fiction happenings from the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Short-Lived Phenomena **$7.95**

**46500. THE EVOLUTION OF RADIO ASTRONOMY.** *J. S. Hey.* One of the pioneers of radio astronomy offers an absorbing history of this powerful technique's remarkable development. **$10.00**

**44000. EINSTEIN AND THE GENERATIONS OF SCIENCE.** *Lewis S. Feuer.* What really accounts for the shattering insights of Einstein, Bohr, de Broglie, Heisenberg, and others. A ground-breaking book with a bold and controversial explanation. **$12.95**

**62630. THE MILKY WAY. Fourth Edition.** *Bart Bok and Priscilla Bok.* Updated and expanded outsized volume, filled with over 125 pictures, charts and diagrams, includes the latest scientific research in wonderfully elegant style. **$15.00**

**44941. THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHYSICS. Second Edition.** *Edited by Robert M. Besancon.* Updated and expanded edition of a modern classic. Over 300 distinguished authorities in 344 articles offer incisive, authoritative information on every topic in physics today. *Counts as 2 of your 3 books.* **$37.50**

**36520. THE BONE HUNTERS.** *Uri Lanham.* The nineteenth-century adventurer-scientists who startled the scientific world, and laid the foundations of modern paleontology. Rare old photographs. **$12.50**

**57010. THE JUPITER EFFECT.** *John R. Gribbon and Stephen H. Plagemann.* In this controversial new work, two prominent astrophysicists argue that the Grand Alignment of the planets in 1982 will trigger a cataclysmic catastrophe. **$7.95**

**78820. THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF THE BEES.** *Charles D. Michener.* The first definitive work on group phenomena among these amazing insects. A classic. *Counts as 2 of your 3 books.* **$25.00**

**56440. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF MAN.** *J. Z. Young.* Awesome study of man in all his dimensions—biological, physiological, psychological, and sociological. *Counts as 2 of your 3 books.* **$20.50**

**42045. DESIGN OF MAN-COMPUTER DIALOGUES.** *James Martin.* A thorough-going study of how effective communication can be achieved between man and computer. **$16.50**

**74171. THE RIDDLE OF THE PYRAMIDS.** *Kurt Mendelssohn.* Pieces together an elaborate puzzle revealing why the pyramids were built. "... a landmark contribution to Egyptology." **$12.95**

**81820. SYMMETRY IN SCIENCE AND ART.** *A. V. Shubnikov and V. A. Koptsik.* This new edition of a classic work on symmetry explores every facet of the subject. *Counts as 2 of your 3 books.* **$35.00**

**62690. MIND IN THE WATERS.** *Compiled by Joan McIntyre.* A unique collection of scientific research and literature exploring the mysteries of intelligence in whales and dolphins. **$14.95**

**58190. INTRODUCTION TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.** *Philip Jackson.* A comprehensive survey of the work in artificial intelligence as well as a broad coverage of other fields interested in the question of intelligence. **$17.50**

**55200. THE INCREDIBLE EGG.** *Dal Stivens.* Explores the range of mating, nesting, and protective behavior that has brought tens of thousands of backboned, egg-producing creatures alive and well through millions of years. **$9.95**

**68630. PHOTOGRAPHING WILDLIFE.** *Jean-Marie Baufle and Jean-Philippe Varin.* Two of the world's leading photographers provide both wealth of information on wildlife photography and an exquisite collection of their finest pictures. **$15.95**

**58730. THE LIVES OF A CELL.** *Lewis Thomas.* Widely acclaimed essays on man and nature, science and life. "... an ode to biology bursting with information." —*The Washington Post.* **$6.95**

**86200. THE WAY OF THE SACRED.** *Francis Huxley.* Drawing on linguistics, anthropology, religion, philosophy, and psychology, a prominent cultural anthropologist investigates the rites, beliefs, places and taboos that various societies have considered sacred. **$14.95**

---

**HOW THE CLUB OPERATES**

• The Book Club **News**, describing the coming Main and Alternate Selections, will be sent to you 15 times a year at three to four week intervals. • If you wish to purchase the Main Selection, do nothing and it will be shipped to you automatically. • If you prefer one of the Alternates, or no book at all, simply indicate your decision on the reply form always enclosed with the **News** and mail it so we receive it by the date specified. • The **News** is mailed in time to allow you at least 10 days to decide if you want the coming Main Selection. If, because of late mail delivery of the **News**, you should ever receive a Main Selection without having had the 10-day consideration period, that Selection may be returned at Club expense. • After completing your trial membership, you will be entitled to take advantage of our bonus plan.

## The Library of Science

2-6AA

Riverside, New Jersey 08075

Please accept my application for membership and send me the three volumes indicated, billing me only $3.95 for all three. I agree to purchase at least three additional Selections or Alternates during the first two years I am a member, under the club plan described in this ad. Savings range up to 30% and occasionally even more. My membership is cancelable any time after I buy these three books. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. **Send no money. Members are billed when books arrive.**

### 3 books for $3.95

**Indicate by number the 3 books you want.**

[ ] [ ] [ ]

Some expensive books count as 2 selections.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Book selections purchased for professional purposes may be a tax-deductible expense. (Offer good in Continental U.S. and Canada only. Prices slightly higher in Canada.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

# IF THIS GOES ON (AND ON, AND ON . . . )

Boy, have we got problems. And if we don't solve them some pretty terrible things are going to happen—and we all know it.

That's the point. Thanks in large part to the efforts of those involved in science fiction, the Big Problems of ecological contamination, overpopulation, dwindling resources, genetic and personal peril arising from drugs and food additives (well, there may still be a bit of room on *that* one) and so on have all become a part of public consciousness—and certainly have been incorporated into the awareness of virtually every reader of science fiction.

In other words, we have already done a more than adequate job of broadcasting the consequences of stepping in it. Maybe it's time to dramatize ways and means of stepping *around* it—and the benefits accruing therefrom. Maybe it's time to begin the Next Phase—one which the world sorely needs—that of instilling an awareness in our rapidly despairing populace that while man and his planet may be in for Hard Times, these Hard Times are by no means inevitable, that, given the will, we have the means and the knowledge to do something about our problems.

Example: Laser-generated fusion is a virtual certainty during this decade. This means that the 1980's will see both cheap, "clean" energy and the first constant-acceleration space-vehicles (oh, what the hell—*spaceships!*) capable of ranging the Solar System at a payload cost of pennies-per-pound at point of delivery.

Example: Cheap, simple, safe, *reversable* male sterilization is imminent. What will this do to world population trends?

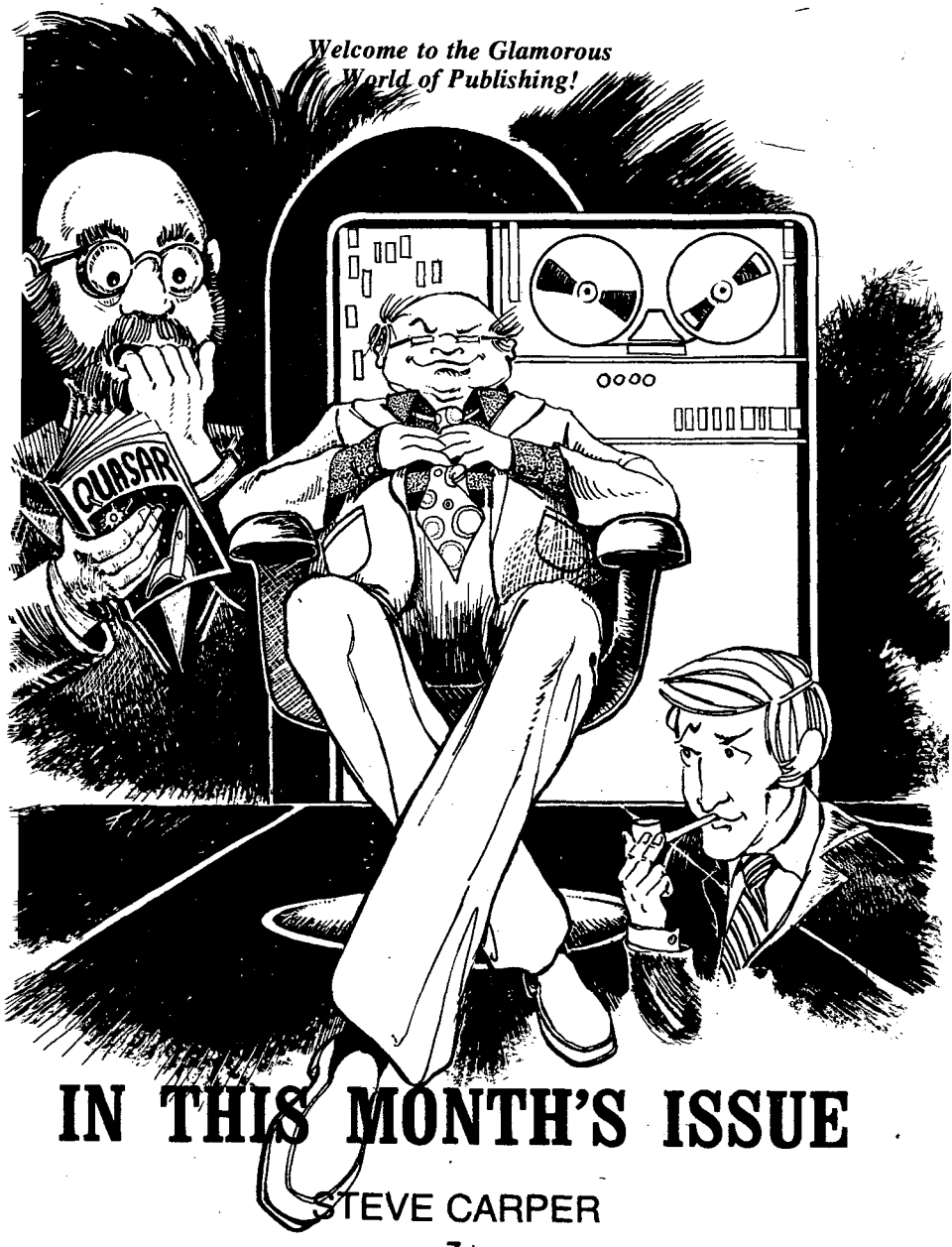
Example: A laser anti-ballistic-missile system could be begun today (and perhaps has been) that would neutralize for the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. the dangers of nuclear proliferation. (See this month's science article.)

So perhaps we should mute our cries of doom, and speak if not in tones of triumph, then at least of hope—and courage. For those of you who have an unconquerable urge to create still another "fully realized world" steeped in misery and horror resulting from 20th Century stupidity—please try another market. I firmly believe the readers are as bored with it as is this editor.

—BAEN



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




# IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

STEVE CARPER



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

To: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Larry. I've been looking over your circulation figures for an upcoming report for Allison Jr. in the main office and I ran across something strange. Listen to this. Paid newsstand circulation for your book for cover-dates July and August '72; May, July and December '73; and March '74 was down almost 5000 copies each. Very regular decreases. I wouldn't have even noticed them in the middle of all your other ups and downs if the drops weren't so even.

But I can't explain them. Not even to myself, let alone someone like Allison who wants nothing more than to get you dropped from the group as it is.

Maybe you have some ideas. It's not in my end. I've checked it all the way down the line. Different months, different seasons, same distributors, same newsstands.

Are you beginning to run porn or is one of our competitors sticking pins into his *Quasar* doll? What gives?

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

To: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

Rodge. (Remember the good old days before we were bought and you still worked with me when I could put your name on line-one instead of seven? Thanks for the warning old buddy. I could give you any number of reasons for our losing circ but I can't think of *anything* that could account for such astounding disregularity. What could it be? Sunspots? Smog warnings? Blonde centerfolds in *Playboy*?

Anyway, I'll put my new assistant on it. He's a BBFU (Bright Boy From Upstairs), somebody's relative probably. We're building up a fine mutual dislike because he's going batty reading the slush pile and he's taking it out on me. Hopefully something like this will send him out of here with foam coming from his mouth. I could use something like that to brighten my day. Besides, even if worst came to worst and he figures this out, we're still ahead. I can't lose.

P.S. Porno would either send our circ up 10% or drive the *next*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

issue's down. Should try it though, sometime.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To: Marshall Enze
Assistant Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Marshall. I'm sending over some circulation figures along with this memo, so you can take your nose out of the slush pile for a while. Dig up the six issues that went bad with as many others as you can find and figure out one of two things: 1) What the hell is similiar about those six or 2) How they are different from the rest. Analyze. Quantify. Draw maps and charts. You may have any resources you think you may need but I want it done in three days—in time for next issue's deadline.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC¡

From: Marshall Enze
Assistant Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

NAME ON COVER. REPORT FOLLOWING.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

Rodge. We may, just may, have something. It sounds strange (obvious was the way my assistant put it) but there isn't anything else as far as we could tell that's common to those six issues and those six issues alone.

Let me tell you a little story.

Sometime back in 1970, not long after we were taken over by TE, Inc. in that massive acquisitions grab of theirs, I began to receive stories through the slush pile from an author I had never heard of before. (I was still doing my own first-reading in those far off, bygone days.) Slush pile or no, these stories weren't at all bad. In fact I bought the first one I saw and every one after that. Unusual. What's more unusual is that he sells *only* to us. And positively strange is the fact that I have no biographical detail on him at all. None. A hint that the name's a pseudonym, a hint that he's young, a hint that he knows computers. Checks go to a box number right here in New York.

The stories came in regularly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and got better and better. Reader response was good. I thought I had a real find in him. I became convinced when, about a year or so after I first heard from him, I got an especially good novelette. Very nice. So I assigned a cover for it and ran it as the lead story in the issue. Naturally his name ran on the cover too.

As an old hack, Rodge, you can guess what the hook is. That was the January 1972 ish.

So. Another story, not as good. I run it in May but his name doesn't go on the cover. In August, though, there it is again. When the circ hits bottom. And again the next May, and July, and, and. Not merely when he's in the issue. Not when he writes a poor story. When he's on the cover.

I can't tell you what the hell is going on. All I know is that I found out just in time to take his name off the cover for next time. The painting has been set up for printing, of course, but I can change the overlay with the names on it just enough so that his name disappears without affecting anything else. Especially the circulation.

Now tell me. Just how fast can you tell me whether or not we get that ten percent drop? In the meantime I'm going to remove my BBFU temporarily from the banalities of his normal existance to see if that Harvard educated brain of his can come up with any other deductions. I'm beginning to feel kindly toward him now, stuck off in this god-forsaken corner of the conglomerate. Maybe investigating this will make him feel useful and keep him out of my hair at the same time.

Keep me posted, and for god's sake not a word to Allison Jr.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Nestor W. Allison Jr.
Director, Publications Division
Printed Media Sector

To: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

Sir. The report on our three year circulation patterns was due on my desk over two weeks ago. Must I remind you that no useful conclusions aimed at improving the circulation of several of our more moribund publications may be arrived at until I have sufficient data at hand to bear on the problem?

If you find yourself incapable of doing an adequate job at your present position, I am sure that somewhere in our vast organization there are many who would prove more capable. Do not make me doubt the wisdom of our promotion of you from that rather



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less demanding position you previously held.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

To: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

Rodge. What's the news? I'm on pins and needles up here.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

To: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Larry. Get off my back already! Allison Jr. is hard enough to take. You of all people should know how long it takes to get results back to us. Nevertheless, I've performed a miracle. By making a mortal enemy of every person I have to work with and may need for a favor someday, I've managed to come up with the data earlier than ever before. And it checks

**Ballantine Books**

*A Division of Random House, Inc.*

**Just back from the Spring Sales Conference where we presented our 1975 list. What a reaction! Never has there been a science-fiction program quite like this one. . .bigger and better than ever!**

**Look for our stunning new logo—Ballantine's Seal of Selection stamped on every sf book. Then there's a spectacular *new* cover "look," featuring design and illustration by top commercial artists—some of whom we are introducing to the field.**

● ● ● ● ●

**We will have larger print orders, bigger ad budgets, additional titles published (three instead of two each month) and lots of reprints and reissues from our million-dollar backlist. In other words: the best of the old, the best of the new and the best of the best!**

**And it all starts in February. . .**

**(over)**




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out, all the way.

Circulation was not down 10%. In fact, it went up, if only 2.7%. Give your assistant a raise. BUT HAS HE COME UP WITH THE REASON YET? That's what I would like to know.

By the way, I've had to turn in the circulation report to Allison Jr., so he may be sending down some nasty memos. Give him the good news about not having these drops in the future, maybe it will slow him down for a while.

P.S. I read some of the guy's stories in the past couple of weeks and they *aren't* bad. Lack a certain life, though. Is there any way we can send him over to our competitors and put him on *their* covers? Or better yet, on a paperback antho or ten?

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Nestor W. Allison Jr.
Director, Publications Division
Printed Media Sector

To: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Sir. A report on the circulation patterns of your magazine during the past three years has come to my attention. There are some startling anomilies in the figures


# Ballantine Books

**Always the best science fiction and fantasy**
**—Our Newest Releases—**

- **STARMAN JONES**
  Robert A. Heinlein ..... $1.50
- **NORSTRILIA**
  Cordwainer Smith ..... $1.50
- **FARTHEST STAR**
  Frederik Pohl & Jack Williamson ..... $1.50
- **A FUNERAL FOR THE EYES OF FIRE**
  Michael Bishop ..... $1.50
- **THE MAN WHO AWOKE**
  Laurence Manning ..... $1.50
- **WARM WORLDS & OTHERWISE**
  James Tiptree, Jr. ..... $1.50
- **MORE THAN HUMAN**
  Theodore Sturgeon ..... $1.50
- **CYCLE OF FIRE**
  Hal Clement ..... $1.50
- **THE TAR-AIYM KRANG**
  Alan Dean Foster ..... $1.50

You'll find them all wherever paperback books are sold. Or, to order by mail, send price per book(s) plus 50¢ per order for handling to Ballantine Cash Sales, P.O. Box 505, Westminster, Maryland 21157. Please allow three weeks for delivery.




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I believe call for an explanation. Study the enclosed copy of the report and prepare a report for my office for no later than this time next week.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To: Marshall Enze
Assistant Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Marshall. Look, damn it, there's such a backlog of slush-pile stories here that I've had to start reading them myself to get things moving. And one of the conditions I insisted on when TE wanted to buy us is that I would never have to stoop so low again. And now Allison wants a report out of me in a week. So I want answers out of you. I know you're doing something because you're never in the office, but it had better have some bearing on our problem.

Now, if I don't hear something from you by tomorrow, you'll find yourself doing lay outs and paste ups for *All Time Great Fantasy Stories* which I also nominally edit, you know. My wrath can be swift and merciless as in the days of old. Send me up something, even one of these thrice-damned memos.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Marshall Enze
Assistant Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To:Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Boss. Don't go getting yourself lost in fantasies of your past glory because—unlike you—I have relatives in high places. I'm not sure if I could get your job taken away, but you'd find yourself answering more memos than I see Adam and Eve stories each day. Fortunately for you my opinion of Allison Jr. (my second cousin, as near as I can figure it) is lower than William Buckley's for Gore Vidal.

But since I'm preparing to take over your somewhat more prestigious job I went to work to save the magazine when I smelled a Machievelliän hand in our circulation figures. There's a complete summary of the last few weeks attached to this, along with an explanation of the time-sharing bills you're going to get for the company computer. I doubt if you'll read it, much less understand it, so I'll simplify it here.

Six years ago, Allison Sr. (my *first* cousin, *comprende*?) added this magazine into his publishing empire as both a tax loss and a reason for asking Congress for special-interest postal legislation. Therefore we are supposed to lose



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money. Somehow you've managed to stop doing so (and as soon as I can figure out how, I'm moving upstairs). Now, Allison Sr. likes this kind of initiative in the face of adversity but it drives Allison Jr. up the wall. Or at least that's how family gossip has it.

Allison Jr. drew up a plan. You had to be made to lose money but it had to be covert or else his old-line capitalist father would be up in arms. How to work it.

I found out from one of the computer jocks in the main office who went to Harvard with me. (I'm billing the gram of hash it took to the company.)

Allison Jr. went to the same computer that works out package names for our lines of board games and paperback action series to come with an anti-euphonious name guaranteed to drive the average science reader screaming into the night. Remember the study he ordered of newsstand buyers of SF magazines? He's been plotting this for a long time.

One problem left. How to get this name on the cover of the magazine where the buying public could see it? Easy.

All of our computer jocks, my cousin discovered, are SF readers. It was no trouble for him to get the whole computer crew interested in a secret project to program ideas into our Scientific Application Systems computer (a wholly owned subsidiery) and teach it to grind out better and better science fiction plots that could be ghosted-up into a complete stories by one of the companies pet hacks—good enough stories to get the "author's" name on the cover in not too many issues.

Nice to know that kind of talent is in my family.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

To: Lawrence Epplinger
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Larry. Hey, I thought you had forgotten all about me but that plan you sent for improving distribution coverage for your magazine really works. Who did you steal it off of? You never knew the first thing about this end of the business. What to let me in on the secret?

Anyway, the early reports that I'm getting on *Quasar* say that sales are up. Positively healthy, in fact. Keep this up and you'll be putting the paperbacks out of business instead of vice versa. Congratulations are in order if you're the cause; if not, give him a raise. P.S. I picked up one of the copies of last month's issue that came floating through here. It was so



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good I may even start reading the zine again. Especially if you keep running stories by that new discovery of yours.

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Lawrence Epplinger
Director, Publications Division
Printed Media Sector
To: Rodger Frew
Sales and Distribution Manager
Publications Division

Rodge. Sorry I took so long to get around to answering you but your memo got misfiled when I changed offices and it took this long to catch up to me.

I'm sending this along with Marshall's report. Remember Marshall, my BBFU? Read his thing first and then get back to this so I can tell you the rest of the story.

All done? OK, now to let you in on the secret of our circulation increase, which must not be breathed to a living soul, especially not even that secretary/mistress of yours.

After Marshall filled me in on the sabotage the rest was easy. The computer jocks up in the billing office were having a fine time playing with their creation until I sent Marshall upstairs to tell them the facts of life.

It would seem that Allison Jr. had neglected to tell them that their little joke was being used to kill their favorite mag.

God, the power of a computer scorned. For revenge they tossed a subtle bug or two in Allison Jr.'s brand new, heavily publicized subscription computer with results that must have had you contemplating suicide the past few weeks. (It won't happen to us, they assure me. As long as I behave myself, that is.)

With the time stolen from naming our new line of packaged art masterpieces we re-ran the results of the newsstand survey and came up with a name for my new "discovery". I like the stories, myself. That computer (with hack-assist) is getting positively talented. As for that other fellow—why everybody knows how erratic authors are. Just a permanent writer's block,

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
TRANSMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

From: Harris Lazluli
Assistant Editor
Quasar Science Fiction
To: Marshall Enze
Managing Editor
Quasar Science Fiction

Cousin Marshall. I've been getting some very strange submissions to the slush pile. Could I come up and talk with you about them? Soon?



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# the POLITICS of RATTICIDE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## ARSEN DARNAY

***Pity poor Noball—his love was hopeless!***

I

"IT happened during the colonization of the Eastern Quadrant, on the heavy-planet Galuben, known to you as the source of the aphrodisiac fleece—in your teenage argot the so-called 'jutting rug.' Some of you probably believe the claims made for the fleece. Quintillions of your parents did or do. You've heard about its properties. It's said to make barren women fecund and impotent men verile. And if you get your gal to sit on it, she'll go mellow. I won't tell you my opinion. I'll let my story do that. Anyway, it happened on Glauben, in my grandfather's time. He played a key role in the affair. He described his experience as 'the politics of ratticide,' and that'll be my title. But please no questions now. You'll hear all you need to hear by-and-by."

With these words the old man paused. The teenies in the B-Deck Whybar gathered around and settled into flato chairs to hear the Taler spin his yarn. He in turn touched a glower to his pipe and pensively puffed on the device. Grains of Millusion mixed with tabak vaporized and drifted invisibly in the air, amplifying the teenies' powers of imagination, while the great Time Ark in which they traveled hurtled from Milky Way to New Frontier. They were a tiny fragment of the Human Wave, expanding outward.

The Taler lowered his pipe at last and told the following story:

IN those days Glauben wasn't as famous as it is now and had been colonized only six hundred years. In fact the Eastern Quadrant was a vast emptiness. We hadn't met the beemen of Marad, nor had we found Superhole, the planet whose great time warp lets us slip through the meshes of dimension toward a new home in this magnificent, cunning Ark. But enough. You get the picture. A thousand planets with colonies of all sizes, levels of development; a million worlds yet to be opened; and Commercial System hell bent for leather, trying to capture its share of the worlds.

Grandfather's name was Borislav Hit, and he served in an outfit called STAC. The initials stood for Special Technical Assistance Corps. STAC's primary mission was to help colonies adapt to new worlds, to overcome unusual problems. But the colonists saw STAC in another light—as



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

System's special good-squad making sure the concessions stayed in line. STAC also protected alien races, enforced the Ecology Convention, did a bit of counter-intelligence against those birds from Empire, and in a pinch investigated crimes, corruptions, and malfeasance in high places. Popular, you understand.

Bushy brows, bushy beard, round nose, shrewd squinting eye, stocky build, a ready laugh.

That was Borislav Enhildo Quantromer Hit, my venerable grandsire.

No matter what body the technicians grew him for this or that assignment, sooner or later he made it look like his original self. He had a fierce kind of will that molded foreign protoplasm rather than let it mold him.

He never needed psy-adjustment after inhabiting an artibod. That's the kind of man he was.

WELL, to get right to the point, in the year 4013, Eastern Quadrant reckoning, that is, a team from System East, on a routine health inventory of Glauben (carried out quadrennially), came back with a ton of tapes and fed them to computers.

Six months later the computers had consumed and digested the stuff. A routine report went by regular channels to the Department of Census and lay there for another six months. Then the data were prepared for assembly into EQ's Quadrennial Health Assessment—a report the Minister East submitted to the government. Then hell broke loose.

For the first time in two standard decades, EQ's health index had dropped by eight points.

They quickly traced the trouble to the Glauben inventory. The Minister East had the Glauben data purged from his Assessment on the basis that they were incomplete.

And early in 4014, Borislav Hit went out to Glauben on the trail of Weil's Disease, Haverhill Fever, sodoku, and other odd but disturbing things like listeriosis, toxoplasmosis, and lumphocytic choriomeningitis.

Never fear, my dear, impatient Rubeema. You need not remember the diseases. We're after the cause.

WELL, said the old Taler, puffing on his pipe, you can imagine how it was.

Borislav, of course, was about to take a well-earned vacation. And, of course, Big Man called him in and told him he'd have to delay his pleasures for the Cause. And, needless to say, Borislav struggled. And finally, as you might expect, he agreed to go.

At the end Big Man rose and put his arm around Borislav's shoulders. He led hm toward the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one-way glass through which Boris could see Big Man's oh-so-desirable secretary.

Big man said with a wary look: "Now, Agent Hit, get out there and clear this little matter up. And do it in a hurry, will you? That's why we selected you. You're a fast operator. As you know, the Minister is pacing the ceiling. Now I don't want to prejudice the investigation, but all of us around here think that it must just be data error. You understand. Those folks in Glauben do very nicely on the economic front, Hit. No sense antagonizing them. Quite a racket they've got going with that aphrodisiac goat pelt they export. Anyway, Hit, a word to the rise, right? The situation might be sensitive, and you must be careful but definitive, Hit. Definitive and discreet. You understand, I'm sure. A delicate situation, by all accounts."

In the front office Borislav joked with the Big Man's secretary, a real juttable fem but always too busy or too virtuous to accept grandfather's advances. A fast operator he might be, but in three years he'd never even operated his hand around her sweetly-plump elbow.

He waved good-bye to her with a catch in his throat. He'd remember her on Galuben, and so should you. Her name was Ita Gitta. Keep in mind her pleasant, oval face, engaging smile, shy lashes. From the back she had a nice rumpy wobble, and from the front she was—she was. . .how should I put it? She was a tail of two titties.

GLAUBEN is a heavy planet, as I said at the outset, several times standard gravity. Visitors march about in suits squishing with levitron and sleep in grav-adjusted hotel rooms. Boris couldn't do that. He was going incognito. Nor could he wait out the five-year adjustment cycle. He had to go in *now* and without a suit.

And here's the first explanation you've been waiting for, Rubeema.

Boris got himself an artibod.

Artibods are no longer legal. They went out fifty years ago with the Genetic Convention pushed through by the Society for the Prevention of Protoplasmic Abuses—with the aid and abetment of colonists, I might add, who didn't like surreptitious visitors like my old grandpa.

STAC had a special ship equipped with all the necessary instruments and grav- or atmosphere-adjusted bodies in all shapes, sizes, ages, and sexes resting in cold storage. In the Corps they called the ship (unofficially, of course) SSS Bod Boat.

SSS, by the way, stands for System Space ship.

Bod Boat took up orbit around



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Glauben's sun. Borislav jumped naked into a warm pool of simublood with a weight attached to his leg. Down there he thought he'd drowned, but he hadn't really. Simublood rushed into his lungs rich with oxygen. But by that time his restless Awareness had already fled. A psychomagnet caught him neatly and squirted him into the artibod he'd already picked out for himself—another stocky but smooth-shaved character laid on a cot in a hi-grav chamber. Boris settled in, opened the bod's eyes, jumped up on the bod's legs, hammered on the door with the bod's fleshy fist, and cried: "Let me out of here!" with the bod's voice.

A loudspeaker answered: "All right, Hit. Cut the dramatics. We know you're just putting it on. Let's give the computer a test, shall we?"

One advantage of artibods, you see, was that they could be equipped with all manner of gadgets. They weren't meant to live especially long. They had terrible digestive systems and tiny livers and non-essentials were left out or off. Borislav, for instance, couldn't have reproduced himself in his new bod, and he knew that he'd be faithful to busy or virtuous Ita Gitta no matter what his Awareness might want to do. His lungs, muscles, and heart were souped up, and he had a computer in his center in place of a bit of kidney and a part of his stomach. Too bad he never had to use the damn thing!

They tested the computer, and it worked very well. The controls were in the roof of his mouth and the playback went straight to his brain, and Noball, as Borislav had named his new bod, had already learned to play on the dials with a very clever tongue.

So it all worked out nicely. Three days and no adverse reaction. Borislav started to grow a beard, but Noball was defective in that regard; the forest was sparse on one side and so, disgusted with Bioengineering, Boris started to shave what little there was to shave, and on the fifth day a STAC scout set him down on a Glauben moon on the dark side with papers and visas and a briefcase full of phony papers from a phony Glauben company. Salesman Boris. On his way back to the home planet in a boxy, blue grav-suit that he would shed back on the planet's surface.

THE Taler puffed and the teenies breathed Millusion.

Now I want you to see Glauben. A trillion people, a good-sized colony with an unusually high birthrate. One continent occupied, four of them empty. A big planet, Glauben. Big trees, big beasts, big mountains. Gigantic cities on coasts and inland.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Soot and smoke and fantastic traffic jams. Deserts and primeval forests crisscrossed by highways and trainways and tubeways and airways above. Shining rivers and lakes. Tractors and fields. Jungles and tundra. I do believe Glauben had a little coal and oil, and in those days the people had a riot of living. Energy pulsed all through the planet. Factories hummed and people traded. They had a philosophy that business was the highest and noblest human occupation, Production was king, Growth was the nod of the Almighty, and when growth stopped or slowed down, the bearded one up there. . .He frowned.

Chief business of Glauben, then as now, was the sale of the aphrodisiac fleece. A small business, in those days. It would expand to galactic dimensions in time—as you well know. All around the spaceport where Borislav landed, protected by glistening black sheets of plastic from the tropical rains, pyramids of pelts waited for shipment to the panting worlds. As Boris would discover later, the pelts played a role in all aspects of the planet's life, which would make the fulfillment of his mission something of a problem, Ecolaws neither here nor there. But of that later.

I told you that Borislav had a will of his own and sooner or later his artibod would do what he wished. Well, so it was on Glauben with Mr. Noball.

Boris landed at the spaceport, one of four on Continent A. He turned in his grav-suit for the deposit, and tossing the gold coin in his hand, he made for the tubeway gates. On the way his eye caught a sign in the window of a small concession. It said:

> TIRED OF LIVING? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR ZEST, YOUR ZING? DOES MRS. YOU COMPLAIN THAT YOU NEGLECT HER? WANT TO BE THE YOU YOU WERE WHEN YOU WERE REALLY YOU? AND APHRO-RUG TOO EXPENSIVE FOR YOU? DON'T FRET MR. YOU. WE'VE GOT WHAT YOU NEED. TAKE VIRILLU-TWO. IT'S GOOD FOR YOU KNOW WHOSE YOU KNOW WHAT!

"Well, I'll be damned," said Borislav to himself rubbing the shaved chin of his artibod. "I'll fix you up nicely, Noball."

He went up to the window and said: "Give me some Virillu-two, babe", to the girl there.

She gave him a tube filled with little round pills.

"How do you take these?"

She hesitated. You take one in the morning and. . . one just. . . before. . ." She blushed a little.

He asked: "What if I take more



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than two? Will it hurt me?"

"I don't know," she said, "I've never taken these."

"I would guess not," he leered. "I mean, does it—is it harmful?"

"It's a two-percent extract."

"Extract of what?"

She gave him a hard stare, and his experienced agent Awareness coupled with the souped-up eyesight of his artibod saw her press a button beneath the counter. Two policemen began to move warily in his direction, and he inquired no further. Rather, he tossed the gold coin to the girl and made a quick get-away. Soon he became the trillion-and-first inhabitant of Glauben. But later, in the privacy of a little hotel, he swallowed the entire contents of the tube.

"There you are, Noball," he muttered. "That shouod make you act more like a man."

That, my children, is the kind of man he was, my grandpa.

WELL, he grew the biggest, bushiest, wildest beard on Glauben, a glorious red beard; and in addition he turned hairy on the chest and arms and legs; hair sprouted from his nostrils and his ears and from between his toes; and it got so bad he had to cut it daily.

"Noball," he said, "I do believe you're overdoing it a bit."

In addition to these physical manifestations of virility, Borislav was sorely troubled by memories of Ita Gitta's oval face, low lashes, and other auxiliaries, and for the first week of his stay on the planet, he forgot all about Weil's Disease, Haverhill Fever, sodoku, listeriosis, taxoplasmosis, and lymphocytic choriomeningitis, and instead wrote her several long letters of the most poetic excellence, straining Noball's competent but pedestrian brain to the edge of a fever.

Now you must understand something more about artibods to understand what happened to your friend and my forebear.

The Taler touched the glower to his pipe and puffed.

Despite their obvious and lamentable deficiencies in the areas of digestion and so forth, he continued, which soon reduced Borislav to a fare of milkgap from the indigenous supergoat Guru (whose mountain cousin Borislav then naively thought was the source of the aphro-fleece), the artibods were pretty well made. And because they served agents in the field, they were full of various repellants, anti-bodies, and whatnot. Little cuts and bruises healed with the rapidity of a miraculous laying on of hands. And fevers were zapped by Noball's by no means puny metabolic reserves.

Had all this not been so, Borislav would soon have sickened and therefore discovered the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

problem—for his hotel room, none of the best, literally swarmed with *xenopsylla cheopis*. . . .

That, my dear Rubeema, is a secret I won't reveal just yet, but let it suffice if I describe this mysterious Something as very small, very dark, capable of incredibly long hops from one warm bod to another warm bod, and when it landed it could bite like blazes. Unfortunately for Borislav's mission and for his great eagerness to try to scale inacessible Mount Ita Gitta, Noball had been grown expressly for the jungle climate of Glauben's A continent, and when *xenopsylla cheopis* did its thing, Noball didn't even feel it; hence Borislav didn't either; and thus neither became aware of the third.

Now let me compound your puzzlement further and reveal that our dark little hopper carried *rickettsia typhi*, and the only reason why ricky-tippi didn't make it into the computer banks of the Glauben health inventory was that to this disease the people had become immune, and the team from System East had lived in a much better hotel. The authorities had made sure of that.

My lovelorn grandfather eventually awoke to the call of duties or else the worst effects of Virillu-Two wore off. At any rate, he became a little more aware of his


DAW BOOKS

**Donald A. Wollheim, Publisher**

FIRST TIME PAPERBACKS

THE R-MASTER, the synthetic superman the world may need in the coming decades—or he may be the *unmaking* of the world. . . The latest GORDON R. DICKSON novel, never serialized, makes its first appearance in paperback. It's a cliffhanger. (UY1155—$1.25)

When you see Roy Krenkel's great cover for AS THE GREEN STAR RISES, you'll know that Lin Carter's fourth novel in that saga is the "ERB" thing in great form! Fully illustrated, too! (UY1156—$1.25)

THE BIG BLACK MARK, A. Bertram Chandler's first full-length novel in a long time, written specifically for DAW Books, presents the pivotal moment in the long space career of his legendary commander Grimes. (UY1157—$1.25)

Thomas Burnett Swann's THE NOT-WORLD will please his legion of readers—it's an eerie and piquant fantasy of the haunted woods of England. Barr did the illustrations. . . . (UY1158—$1.25)

Kaifeng, the man who wanted the universe, meets the man from FATE on a haunted planet in THE GHOSTS OF EPIDORIS. A new novel by the legendary Gregory Kern. (UQ1159—95¢)

A request and 20¢ in stamps will bring our catalog material. Write to
DAW Books, Inc.
28th Fl.
1301 Ave. of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10019




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surroundings. When the buzzer sounded in his head, as it had every half hour for a week, he flicked his tongue to the roof of his mouth and growled in a voice that already sounded a little like his own:

"Yeah, what do you want?"

"For the sake of the living Jus, Hit, what in the Cos are you doing?"

"Been writing letters," Borislav said.

He had. They lay all around him in draft. He had penned the final versions on tiny pieces of aphro-fleece leather you could buy down the street in a shop. With a quill. In red ink. They were already on their way in a Time Collapse jumper back to the outer office of the Big Man who was now on the intercom built into his head.

"Letters! God, man, the Minister East is crawling the walls; and his staff is pacing the ceilings; and their staffs are up in the trees; and so the Deputy Assistant Underminister is shaking the bars; and his staff is rattling the cage; and—You know what I mean! They're coming in the windows!"

"I'm sorry. A little trouble with Noball."

"Who?"

"My artibod."

There was a sad sighing in Borislav's head. "All right, Hit. Tell me what you've observed so far."

"Nothing. I've been in this room, and down the street to a shop, and to the post office to mail off my letters. I've been buying some goat-pap in a five-one—"

"A what?"

"A five-one. A store. Open from five to one. These Glauben cats know how to hustle. Growth, they say. Business. Anyway, Big Man, nothing unusual. I'm looking out past this old fire-escape. Some smoke is rising up ahead there. I see all sorts of roof tops. And to my right is a piece of the ocean, and to the left I see the desert and some trees that look like palms only they're much thicker. And what else? There was a car crash in the street last night, and—"

"Spare me. Please spare me that, Hit. We sent you to Glauben to track down disease, not to paint landscapes."

"One hellishly rickety fire-escape," Borislav said.

"You get that artibod of yours *out* there! And start working, my friend, or we'll give you a little stimulation."

"Yes, sir!" my grandfather said, and now he was fully awake at last.

By a 'little stimulation' Big Man meant the stimulation of Borislav Enhildo Quantromer Hit, the original Hit, the one in that pool



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of simublood with a weight around his leg to keep him down, for Borislav never lost contact with himself entirely, else he would die. He obscurely knew himself back there on SSS Bod Boat breathing in the viscous stuff filled with oxygen and nutrients, and if Big Man chose, he could make life miserable for that helpless Borislav back there or up there or whatever.

But to continue.

Borislav sat down on the edge of his cot and buried his bearded face in his hands. A little black Something aimed for the back of his neck, but Noball repelled it and Boris felt nothing. Instead he recalled his stay on the planet thus far, searching for clues; and then he discovered a nagging little note buried under the Virillu experience. The girl in the concession booth had called the cops when he had asked after the source of the extract. Now why would a body do a thing like that? Had Boris revealed himself by that single question? And what, by the way, did they have to hide?

Of course, he looked like a Glauben man, a perfect replica of the planetary type. Heavy planets bred them thick of limb and fat of jowl. They came tall as if to defy the gravity and, on Glauben, they could also tolerate a whisp of ammonia in the atmosphere without a mask. So the girl had clearly taken him for a native—and a native didn't ask? Didn't ask *that* question, clearly. A native knew.

About this time a knock sounded on his door, and the chamber maid came in to clean up. She stayed downtown as long as she could, and she cleaned up some rooms in the evening, especially if the guest didn't mind.

She was used to Mr. Hit's ways. The poor man sat at the narrow little table and scribbled those letters so fine. Sometimes he threw away a page or two and she read the crumpled paper in the basement. Tugged your heart. So she came in without his by-your-leave, surprised to see him idle. And he, in turn, looked up and saw her for the first time with his agent eyes wide open, as it were.

He stared at her; he stared at the scars on her face and on her hands. Upon closer inspectinn he also saw scars on her legs exposed beneath a drab, grey skirt.

He pointed involuntarily to her face. "What's that?" he asked. "What happened to you?"

The chamber maid looked at him. She didn't understand.

"Those scars," he said. "How did you get them?"

The chamber maid immediately drew the right conclusion. She was of the lower classes and therefore directly exposed. She lived down by the wharves in a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rickety shack near where they unloaded grain ships. She called herself lucky for working here, in the Grand Hotel, as the place was called. She didn't have to fight them here although sometimes they invaded the basement and a few lived in the walls. And so, of course, she guessed at once that Borislav was an agent, although he looked like anybody might, of the upper classes, that is. . . .

No, dearest Rubeema, you may *not* ask. A Taler has his rights, my girl, and one of them is to increase the suspense. Borislav didn't know, and so you may not either.

THE Taler paused and lit his pipe again. The teenies were silent. They leaned forward in their flato chairs. The blue smoke rose up in elaborate spirals. The Colormixer on the wall wove patterns in blues and reds, this time dotted with white stars.

So. . . .

So the chamber maid turned and fled. Down the stairs she went. She bolted. Bolted! On the way she upset a bucket and mop. They made a tinny clatter.

Borislav went right behind her, down the stairs in her wake. He heard her excited whisper down below. Then the burly man in shirtsleeves who sat at the night desk came around prepared for trouble. He summoned an even burlier porter who followed in a dirty red jacket. They trampled up the stairs with grim faces and balled fists toward Boris. He didn't trust Noball to win in this fray, so he ran back up to his room with a hop over the overturned bucket and mop. He locked the door and entrusted his artibod to that hellishly rickety fire escape. Down he went and away he went, into the night.

Soon sirens sounded and red lights circled and cars bucked to a stop before the Grand Hotel.

But by that time Borislav was well on his way toward a solution to his puzzlement. Let me leave him for a moment and regale you with a lecture about the Ecology Convention.

Now the Eco-Convention goes a long way back, back to the first days of the Western Quadrant where it all started on the legendary planet Earth, but the principle is simple enough and you know something about it to boot. If you've ever landed on a foreign planet, you know what you go through. They bathe you, they squirt you, they irradiate you. Every cell of your body is purified. The flora of *your* stomach must yield to the flora of *their* stomach. They probe beneath your nails and they run electronic fingers up and down your hairs, one by one. Tourist planets are a little sloppy, but even they do the minimum.

You ever ask yourselves why?



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, to come around in a circle, they do it because of the Ecology Convention.

In the early days of colonization, in the Obscure Age of the Human Wave, people were less careful about such things, and so we lost entire solar systems to ecoblight. A tiny little beast, for instance, too small for the eye to see, can disrupt an ecosystem to which it isn't adapted. That was and is the rationale. Of late I've noticed a slackening of vigilance. Total isolation never really worked, and now people go through the motions. Some of our learned sages conjecture in magazines the masses never read that genetic 'pollution' and 'ecosystem collisions,' as they are pleased to call these phenomena, may even be a good thing. Others argue, persuasively, I think, that man is genetic pollutant enough, and anything else you might introduce won't matter much. But that is neither here nor there for the purposes of my story. In the days of my grandfather Borislav, the Eco-Convention was not only taken seriously; it enjoyed a kind of revival thanks to the blighting of Palomar IV by the Hirotishy sand worm—an episode you may research at your leisure in the Pedy.

My point is this. No colonizing wavelet ever took to a new planet anything but sterilized bodies and sterilized tools. Period. Once on the surface, they could do what they pleased. Space-based experimental stations (STAC operated several thousand—they moved from cluster to cluster on a schedule) carefully tested the eco-relations between alien flora and fauna, and in rare instances permission was granted, say, to plant a Humro wheat in a Duskitanian soil; to bring in an inoccuous palm for aesthetic reasons; and so forth. Let me stress that this happened rarely, and while that reduced the kind of fun and games the Glauben corporiarchs still play, I think we've gained more than we lost.

By now even you, Rubeema, must be getting the drift. Reluctantly your Taler has relinquished the reins of suspense. But you'll accompany me nevertheless, I trust, as we find Borislav again and pick up the second part of this story.

## II

Now you shall hear about matters more serious than Borislav's infatuation with Ita, although for Borislav that was serious enough.

He fled through the evening crowds of Cosmopolis, the capital of Glauben's Continent A. He hustled along with little glances over his shoulder (he'd flunked his Secret Agent course). The people—decked out in evening clothes and redolent or perfume,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to the opera and the theater—probably took him for a madman. That hair! That look in his eyes!? It was not my grandfather's greatest hour. But then he wasn't a hero in the conventional sense, just an average agent of STAC. (Had he had greatness, I would sit in the Lords rather than warble yarns to teenies in a Time Ark!)

Instinct or good sense led him away from the opulent center. Behind him police cars wailed in their search, stupidly racing up and down the geometrically laid-out streets of downtown Cosmopolis.

He hustled; he slowed down; finally he walked along casually, catching his breath. Street lights thinned out, disappeared. The brilliance lay far behind. Ahead loomed shadows, shacks, and palm trees in between. People on porches. The red glow of joyweed. The sweetish odor of fermenting garbage.

He changed his direction at frequent intervals. Had he had a precise goal, surely he'd have lost his way. But he walked without much care although generally in the direction of the ocean. He hoped to find rest of sorts on the beach behind a comfortable rock. The surf would lull him. By morning he'd figure out something.

On this mad planet, every question he asked got him in trouble!

And then, not far from the beaches, he made his discovery.

At that moment he walked beside a tenement of sorts in the dark, narrow, unpaved street of a poor and shabby quarter. An alley to his right. A little ways ahead a vaulted doorway led into some kind of courtyard.

Boris ducked into the alley because he saw the headlights of a car turn into his street and judged it safer to hide. The big, sleek cars Glauben folk used seemed to have no place in this neighborhood. He guessed it was a cop.

In his haste he stumbled over something. The Something gave an angry squeal. He felt a sharp bite on his leg. Noball's splendid metabolism immediately healed the wound, but Borislav lost his balance and fell against what had looked like a tree trunk but turned out to be a garbage can thickly covered with large, hairy creatures that scampered off as he larched into the car.

Then he saw movement all across the alley. The ground had begun to move. Greenish eyes glowed in the darkness. Feet scurried over broken glass.

At the same time, involuntarily, Boris had a vision of Ita Gitta. A wish-vision, if you like. She beckoned with a hand while with the other she held a flimsy veil over her obviously naked front.

Come, Borislavissimus. Come, Borislavissimine.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Boris shivered. Traces of Virillu-Two? There was a rank odor in the air. The car wobbled past on the uneven clay surface of the street. Up above him he heard faint laughter.

He stood in a kind of daze for a moment longer, and then he realized what he had seen.

What in the depth of damnation! he cried in his thoughts. Noball, wake up! Did you see what I saw?

He had seen rats. He'd seen a plague of rats. They had filled the alley. They had fed on garbage from several upright and several upturned cans. Only, of course, that couldn't possibly be. And Borislav calmed himself. He had also seen Ita Gitta, nearly naked, at that. And he knew she couldn't be here in this alley, and neither could the rats, and so it must have been that powerful hair tonic he'd swallowed like a blooming fool.

But then, almost as if to make liars of his thoughts, he saw them again. They came slowly in single file. They hugged the walls, long whiskers in touch with the brick, green eyes aglow. They stared at him. They came toward him, toward the food. They resumed feeding with quick nervous glances at Boris, and as they filled the alley he again hallucinated the girl, but only for a second; for now he was overcome with a powerful pulse of anger.


**THE ALIEN CRITIC**

**An Informal & Irreverent Science Fiction & Fantasy Journal**

**Edited & Published by Richard E. Geis**

**Issue #12 (Feb.) will feature a combination interview/article with HARLAN ELLISON by Richard Delap.**

**Also: "Science Fiction's Greatest Disaster—*Hugo Bernsback*!" A Revisionist View by Darrell Schweitzer.**

**Nostalgia—"Visit To a Pulpy Planet" by Milton F. Stevens.**

**Columnist: *Larry Shaw.***

**Every Issue—The Archives: new book & story lists.**

**Quarterly/sample $1**
**year $4/two yrs. $7**

**THE ALIEN CRITIC**
**P. O. Box 11408**
**Portland, OR 98211**





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No hell-vision could taunt Borislav Hit with demonic impunity. It these were rats, he'd catch himself one and feel its furry reality with his hands. And if he saw what wasn't there, those clowns from Bioengineering could just pull him off this planet in a hurry, and he'd personally see to it that Noball went into the vat.

He grabbed a piece of broken beam and hit at the nearest rat in a fury, but the beast leaped to the side and the beam raised a tinny ruckus as it hit the barbage can and its leaning lid fell off. He rampaged among the rats. He ran up and down the alley, a weird, bushy-bearded, stocky berserker in the light of Glauben's moon which, at that very moment, peeked past the roof of the tentement to shed its milky light on the scene.

Borislav failed to catch a rat. They were too quick and agile and disappeared long-tailed into burrows and holes. In a moment he stood alone again in the moonlight with a stump of wood in his hand.

"Just you wait," he whispered fiercely, throwing the beam away. "Come on, Noball. If force won't do it, cunning will."

He picked an appropriate burrow, melted into the shadow of the wall, and waited. After a while a whiskered nose peeked out. Then came a head followed by the long, fat, pear-shaped body of a rat heading away from Borislav toward the sweetish smell of fermenting waste—except that it didn't get very far, for Boris leaped out after it like a warball player on a flying tackle. Noball's souped-up hands grabbed the creature just as it turned with a fierce snarl and bit Borislav on the wrist. Borislav endured the bites and scrambled to his feet. He cracked the rat's head against the brick and the creature shuddered before it went limp.

THE Taler fell silent. He knocked out his pipe and refilled it carefully from a porcellain bowl inlaid with snakes of gold. The glower glowed red. Smoke rose. The Taler stared into the distance.

Well now, children, he resumed at last, what now follows is both a little sad and a little difficult to relate, for it involves several simultaneous states of mind on the part of my granddad and your friend, Borislav Enhildo Quantromer Hit, owing to the powerful effect of the dead rat's emanations, which confused his consciousness to an extreme degree. On top of that, he had a big heart, no matter what body he had on, and he felt what he heard and saw deeper perhaps than another one might.

Lest you lose your way in his thoughts, let me tell you what really happened at the outset. Boris-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lav went into the courtyard he had glimpsed earlier, carrying his rat. He fell into a conversation with a youngster in his early teens. The boy took him into the tenement, and there Boris spoke to an older man. Then he continued toward the beach. On the way he bought some goat milk. That's the action and here's what it was like.

Waves of violent longing pulsed through Noball's hands and arms and up into Borislav's Awareness. He chased after Ita's receeding naked form through marbled corridors, past squirting fountains. In the simublood of SSS Bod Boat's hold tank, the fully equipped body of the original and inimitable Borislav Quantromer underwent physiological changes that would have embarrassed its absent owner, but fortunately only computers watched, and they translated what they saw into huge, sharp peaks on a hormone graph.

Hold the bleeder by the jutting tail, man. Can't you see that some infernal something comes up through that jutting pelt? Yeah, Noball, drag our buddy along by the tail. That's better, really.

Diminished vibrations. . . .

A trillion rats swarmed in Borislav's Awareness filling warrens under half the continent. Tribe upon tribe of rat; regiments, kingdoms, empires of rodenticity. A billion nests squeaked with the newborn. A billion nest odors rose warmly into channels of clay. Rat wars. The waxing and the waning of ratty dynasties. A few centies beneath soil surface lived a red root fungus native to Glauben—like all things except man and this repulsive rat. The fungus had learned to live in the rat's epidermis and its waste products engendered a strange effluvium.

He gathered this from the youngster.

The youngster wouldn't talk at first. Borislav tossed a gold coin alluringly. It glinted in the milky light of Glauben's moon. The rat lay on the uneven stones that paved the courtyard, its tail in Noball's hand.

And so? What do they eat?

Hey, Mister. You're goofy. What *don't* they eat?

The youngster's right arm was missing at the elbow. It ended in a stump. He waved it in Borislav's face. Two of his toes were also missing, and his young face was white with moon-shaped scars.

Each day at dusk, caravans of trucks loaded with specialized equipment moved out into the jungle hinterlands and the tundra areas of the continent from the myriad settlements of Galuben. The men set up intricate barriers of netting. Others inserted sonic devices into selected burrows picked by computers from aerial maps. Then at a signal—see the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white smoke of the flare from the gun of the man in charge? He stands by his dune-buggy on top of the rise—the sonics blasted away. See the land explode with swarms of rats? See the rats caught in the elaborate nets. . . .

Look out, Mister. If you don't watch it, the brothers will eat your rat.

Come on, Noball, pull that beast out of their ravenous teeth. Go on, pull away, rip it away. Scoot, brothers, get back, get away.

And?

And in the rancid odor of the red root fungus waste reacting with the epidermic layers of rat pelt, Ita Gitta again sailed down a marble hall in the costume of the first woman while fountains played.

Their steps echoed through the tentement. The rat scraped on the floor. Out of dark holes in the wall live rats darted out and snapped at their dead brother. Naked children bunched at the end of the corridor and ran way only to stop and bunch and look again with fingers in their mouth. Disfigured children.

Is it laughter that I hear? And do I have a strange sensation that every human in this building one minute past pubescence groans in the act of reproduction?

Now the rats were dead and on fast-moving portable conveyor belts they entered the automatic skinning machines. My uncle, he can tell you all about that, he worked on one all his life.

Noball, you're not watching. Our rat has lost its head and trails an ooze of blood. The youngster limped. You can't walk straight with toes missing, now, can you? That's my uncle there. You better give him a coin too. He's blind. Ask your questions.

How do children survive in this place? Or is that the wrong question to ask?

The automatic shinning device, you see, Mister, is fast as anything, and people don't have to handle the pelts, which is a good thing. The emanations are strongest just after a rat dies. Of course, you understand—and thank you for the gold florin; my retirement pay won't buy the bread—they lose a good bit of the pelt. The yield is a few square centies a beast, but it's a trade-off, like we used to say in the crews. The pieces are collected and they go through drying drums, around and around. They run the drier gases through cryo-coolers to collect the extract. Then the dried pelt-pieces are shipped off to be stitched into pelts after a careful color sort.

The youngster pointed to a baby cot completely encased by a strong wire cage. He held up the stick he carried. At its end Borislav saw the sharp glint of a blade. "That's how, " the boy said.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In an obscure corner of the crowded room something moved rythmically beneath some blankets.

The boy's stick-blade chopped at a skinny fellow who'd followed the blood-trail into the room.

Now see that portable pipeline vomit red liquid residues from skinning trucks back to the ground. See the stuff ooze into burrows.

The blind man said: "Mister, they're *not* trying to eradicate them. What do you think? They want 'em to *breed*! In no time at all the burrows they clean out are full again, and the new ones eat what's left of the old ones."

The old man spoke a vision of sleek men and women in mountain-top castles. He spoke electronic apparatus around the castles and thick wire deep beneath and above the ground, hard-meshed and gnaw-resistant. He spoke yachts on the ocean, all pretty and white and sun-bronzed beautiful people in white walking the white decks with glasses in hand and smiling. He spoke fat bankrolls delivered to the bank by trucks thickly armored and guards who held pistols in their hands. He spoke spaceships lifting off into the sky.

But all this is a violation of the Ecology Convention.

The *what*?

The building sang a rising chorus of Growth Growth Growth Sigh. . . . Growth Growth Growth Growth Growth Sigh. . . .

The children bunched around the door and listened with fingers hooked into lips and with knife-sticks in hand. Their bellies were large and extended, their eyes dark and round in pale narrow faces. Someone laughed somewhere as Ita Gitta looked out from behind a marble column with an eye and a tit.

The building sang sodoku and Haverhill Fever transmitted respectively by *streptobacillus moniliformis* and *spirillum minus*, both of which live happily on the gums and teeth of rats. Through minute cuts and abrasions *leptospira icterohemorrhagiae* sang in the bloodstream of rat piss and Weil's Disease. And on a flourish from the knife-tipped baton of the boy, toxoplasmosis, listeriosis, and lymphocytic choriomeningitis joined in the Lesions, Sores, and Fevers Song.

Ancient, blind operator of a rat skinning machine, tell me this. Why do they hunt them in the jungles and the tundra and why not here in the city where they are as thick as a carpet?

Bearded stranger so full of gold, I never operated a skinning machine. I had a more humble assignment. After the gorge discharged into the soil and the caravan formed up to take us back, my colleagues and I crawled



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the drums, and while the trucks bounced home, we cleaned and replaced the blades. I hold up my arms so you can see the many cuts I received in my life's work. Put your finger to the leathery skin and feel the tangles of hard tissue.

But I asked you. . . .

Here in the city? Stranger, it would be uneconomical to hunt them here. It wouldn't be cost-effective. We were efficient, I tell you. We processed four hundred kay a day out there on an *off* day. Now here, in the city, it would be much too costly. And the pelts are less nice. The children stick them in the back and the soil here is deficient in the red root fungus that interacts with the rat epidermis to create the wondrously aphrodisiac effect. . . .

He dragged the headless rat through the tentement, across the poorly paved courtyard, and out into the uneven clay street. He stopped and tossed a handful of gold toward the children bunched in the vaulted courtyard door. High up someone laughed.

He walked along toward the beach, and as he made progress so did the hungry rats who came behind him. They darted forward and took bites of their brother, jerking hard on the carcass so that Noball's hands had trouble holding the tail. Borislav was in a daze. He thought he sensed rats everywhere, up on the roof tops sitting like a green-eyed chain of beads; in the windows, tails a-curl; in the crowns of palms.

Finally Noball's fingers held only a tail. Borislav made Noball throw it away. Up head he saw the red-white-and-blue light of a five-one. He went in and asked for a gallon gourd of Guru juice.

The rest is short. On the beach, surrounded on all sides by suspicious little mounds and doubtful tracks in the sand, Borislav shuddered and cast his eye out to sea. Out there he perceived a small light and heard the faraway clang of a bell buoy. He checked his gourd seal and slowly walked into the water. He swam out into the night, using Noball's souped-up body to its limit, until he reached the buoy, a large affair and incredibly loud at close proximity. He crawled up on the platform. He tied his wet coat jacket to the bell's tongue to silence the critter. Then he put out the Red Priority call for STAC Emergency Operations.

What's that, Rubeema? A 'gallon'? A gallon is an ancient measure of liquids. It isn't used now and it wasn't used on Glauben then. But Talers are permitted a little poetic license when it suits.

## III

CHEER up, children, why so gloomy? The Whybar of your Time Ark is a place of truth. To



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

live is to laugh, to smile, no matter what. I sing of man and of his folly. I sing also of man's large and generous heart, the heart of my granddad, one Borislav Hit, who'd seen worse things and better, and who knew how to take the sweet with the alkaline.

Here it was dawn over the Glauben world ocean, a rosy light sat on the saddle of the wine-red, heaving sea. Borislav had snoozed in comfort, a sandbag under his hair-bush head, rocked and cradled in the waters. The air smelled fresh and sweetly saline. The waves splashed gently against the buoy. Was Borislav cheerless? Nay, nay. He jumped up filled with energy again; he cracked the goat-gourd and swallowed some milk. "Hey, there," he cried to a large red gull approaching to sit on top of the structure. He had forgotten the night. He looked toward the future. He was an agent of STAC, and agents of STAC looked forward, not back. They didn't keep score. They picked themselves up.

Borislav had put in his call for Emergency Operations, and the response to his call was instantaneous—that is to say instantaneous by STAC standards, which meant that Borislav spent nearly a week on the buoy waiting for the spaceships to land. But he used his time wisely, and the Guru milk lasted the whole time—it was the perfect fare for Noball's troubled digestive system.

Borislav sought answers to three questions, and he caused several scandals and dozens of investigations by asking—no mean feat for an unwashed agent talking to himself on a swaying buoy in the Blauben sea. STAC was popular, as I've said.

Item. He wondered out loud to the System authorities how come that health team had found *any* evidence of disease. Surely the local authorities were more clever than that? Why had earlier teams found no sign of that long list of diseases that I shan't repeat again, dearest Rubeema. The answer was: by accident or by the treasonous activity of some official of the Glauben Department of Health. For, as it turned out, health teams come to Glauben were soon engaged in mindless debaucheries in low-grav hotel rooms for the duration of their stay, while the local boys put together sanitized data. Someone had slipped into that carefully selected packet of tapes one or two with authentic information.

Item. He wondered out loud how *rattus norvegicus* had gained a gnaw-hold on this planet? Who had inspected the colonizing ships on the airless moon of Glauben six hundred years ago? And as the answer of bribery and kick-backs came kicking back, the reputation of several Underministers was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smirched posthumously in the process, and it turned out that the Galuben settlers had thought to sneak in the seeds of *lacrema veni,* the levitating flower, thinking they'd make a killing on levitron; but in protecting their seed stores, they protected *norvegicus* as well, which adaptable creature soon learned to live in the hi-grav conditions and soon made friends with a certain red root fungus a few centies below soil surface. Glaubenites still praise their good fortune.

Item. How come, Boris asked—in a voice increasingly his own—how come that the famous Computer on Pappa hadn't nailed the correlation between those diseases and the rat? "You *did* ask Computer, now, didn't you?" he growled. Computer had been asked. Unfortunately, they told Boris, it took five million skilled people to keep Computer programmed. What with the low pay and status that clung like an odor to feeders, they had three million vacancies at the Temple, and so. . . . "What in the Cos does the Pappa-C do?" "He balances the System East budget, Boris. . . ." "Oh, Jus Chris!"

By about the fifth day the Guru milk ran out. Borislav took a slip of indestructible scriptoplast from his field notebook and wrote a message on it. He stuck the message in the bottle, resealed the translucent container, and tossed it to the waves. The message said:

"Darling Ita, wherever you may be on the shores of the Cosmic Sea, know that Boris-love-issi-you."

MAY I have a glass of water? Thank you. Your name is Francisco, isn't it? Thank you, Francisco.

The Taler drank and continued.

Now it is time for you to see my grandsire in a new role. Borislav the Boss. He takes command of Task Force-STAC, four supertransports in orbit around the planet and nine hundred thousand troops on the ground, brought down in fleets of shuttles that land on large segments of desert in the center of Continent A. Following a radio signal, a hydroplane glides to a halt in a track of foam. Boris leaves his bell buoy. And then, as the PAC or Planetary Agent in Charge, he is suddenly the peak of a pyramid of people, all of them in dark brown, rubbery and sterilized levitron suits. Rapidly a sizeable city is built on the desert—command post, staff buildings, barracks for the troops. Communications are laid. People salute Borislav Enhildo Quantromer Hit, and in the best tradition of a military leader, he acknowledges these signals of respect with a lazy wave from Noball. Members of his legal and public relations staff travel to Cosmopolis and there present to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Concession formal charges of willful violation of the Ecology Convention. A set of orders is handed over. All of the planet's rat-catching enterprises are soon drafted—men and caravans—to serve under orders of TF-STAC. And while shuttle ships land physical pyramids of chemicals on a day-night schedule, Borislav leans over newly minted operations plans in his headquarters quonset.

Few people can take a change so great. But Borislav was an agent of STAC. He made the transition without so much as a blink in Noball's eyes. One day a rat catcher drunk on aphrodisiac, the next day a generalissimo commanding forces. All in a day's work. Nothing to get shook up about. Tomorrow he might impersonate a belly dancer somewhere—although, truth to tell, Borislav would've been a *bearded* belly dancer.

The Task Force members enjoyed this assignment. They chafed a little at Borislav's first command—*no* repeat *no* grav-tents would be used. Everyone had to wear the squishy levitron suits (except Boris of course; he had an artibod). He didn't want his force to stage the greatest orgy in the history of STAC—a high possibility considering that half the members were women. In the suits all were protected—from the smell and the temptation both. But STAC liked the operation. Rat eradication was the most common excercise in the Corps owing to the cunning and adaptability of *rattus*, more truly Man's inseparable companion than *canis familiaris*. Easy, no trouble, you knew exactly what to do and how to set it up—although the more grizzled colonels admitted that STAC had never had to do so large an operation. Most planet concessionaires *wanted* their rats controlled; they'd never let things get so out of hand.

You can see it. A holiday atmosphere hung about the camp. Strike teams headed out laughing and joking over their intercoms to all corners of the continent. Unhappy locals waited for orders and deployed their caravans. Mammoth incinerators were fabricated and set up. Within days the smoke of burned rat lay dark over the land—and yet the work had barely begun.

Borislav remembered the tentement where the stump-armed boy had introduced him to the blind knife cleaner. His heart swelled with magnanimity. He picked an elite team from the nine hundred thousand. They flew in copters to the area of the tentements. They staked out a neighborhood of several square kilms for the operation. The people were evacuated in requisitioned buses. Boris found the boy and kept him by his side.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now, son," he said in a gruff, fatherly way, "now you'll see something!"

Then, after the initial survey had been taken and the computers had yielded a pattern, gas trucks drove up and pumped sulfur dioxide, hydrogen cyanide, and methyl bromide into holes and burrows. Huge water mains were diverted to flush out the subterranean massgraves of ratdom. Bait was laid for animals that might have escaped—a rich fare of strychnine, zinc phosphide, various arsenicals, thallium sulfate, barium carbonate, yellow phosphorus, and wondrous anticoagulants. What the gas didn't get and the water didn't drown, internal hemorrhages, pleural effusion, kidney destruction, gastroenteritis, heart paralysis, convulsions, exhaustion, and asphyxia ripped away permanently into Rat Walhalla. Then they repeated the operation. Finally, STAC forces laid a wire wall around Borislav's pet areas, three meters deep into the ground, eight meters into the air—gnaw-proof, electrified, much like those that protected the mansions of the rich.

To the rats he was Hitler the Hun. To the people Schweitzer the Saint. He filled Noball's lungs with pride. He gestured to the grizzled colonels. "Let the people return," he said grandly with a lazy wave of Noball's hand.

The buses came back. In anticipation Borislav had mounted on the hood of a huge truck near the break in the wire; he stood there with his arms folded across his chest, his hairy chin out, his eyes far-seeing. The boy leaned against a tire of the truck. He played with his knife-stick, eyes on the clay.

Imagine Borislav's surprise when—instead of the joy and laughter he had expected—the people limped by surly and glum with nary a look at their hirsute saviour. A tiny grin on Borislav's puss slowly faded.

He leaned down toward the boy. "Tell me, son. Why are they unhappy? They should be laughing, dancing, jumping up and down. What is this?"

The boy said: "Mister, you've destroyed their livelihood."

"How now, boy?"

"How now, Mister? I'll tell you how now. Most of the men here work in the caravans. Most of the women sew pelts in the city. The men—they're out there now under the command of your weird-looking spacemen destroying what feeds us. The women have been laid off. When you're gone and all the rats are dead. . . ."

"What, son? Speak up."

"We'll starve, that's what."

Borislav said: "Son, it'll be better! How can you call this living. Look at your people. Look at them limp by without toes. Look



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at those hands with fingers missing. Look at the white scars and sores and lesions. Just look at those children, marked for life. You're wrong. This can't be. They should be happy."

The boy laughed drily. "Who asked you to do us good?" he asked. He broke his knife-stick over his knee. He used his stump most artfully to hold one end of the stick in the process.

Borislav pouted in silence. After a moment he said: "Who's trying to do good, boy? I'm just doing my job."

"Then why are you standing up there on that truck?"

Borislav snorted. He jumped off the truck and went to his helicopter. "Take off," he barked at the pilot. "Ingrates," he muttered. "I hope the rats come back, I do. Don't you, Noball?" But Noball said nothing. He had something with his stomach.

THE copter flew too high for Borislav to see—and even Noball's souped-up eyes couldn't see through walls—hundreds of Concession agents going from person to person with sheafs of petitions in hand. While TF-STAC gathered rats, Concession gathered signatures. They asked the rich and they asked the poor. They walked up spiralling walkways to mountain tops and gathered signatures around tables of the most exquisite construction and polish. They ducked into ill-smelling hovels and gathered illiterate X's in gloom. Nobody argued, nobody refused. Elsewhere a certain health official of the Concession Department of Health was apprehended by the authorities and put against the wall with his eyes blindfolded some fine dawn. And eventually activities invisible to Borislav's Awareness and Noball's eyes had consequences.

Wondrous charts had been constructed and lined the walls of Ratticide Central. Black bars on graphs showed the estimated rat population on Glauben, and red bars indicated the number killed, region by region. The red bars climbed slowly, trying to catch the black. Borislav liked to sit in the room and watch staffers post changes as reports rolled in from the seven corners after each incinerator burn-out.

One day, midmorning, in the third week of the operation, a buzzer sounded in Borislav's artihead. He moved an expert tongue to establish the connection. Big Man was on the line, and Borislav instantly smelled a rat—if you'll forgive the expression.

"Hit."

"Sir."

"What in the hell are you doing?"

"Killing rats."

"Thought so. Goddamned, Hit, you stop that at once. I want or-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ders out this instant to cease and desist."

Borislav waited for a moment. Then he said: "Big man, you can't chew me out for this. You gave the orders; you approved the operation. I remember your words, Big Man. You said, 'Good show, Hit. A competent job.' So don't try to sit on me now."

"You sandbagged me, Hit. You pulled a sack over my head. You didn't tell me how sensitive this issue is."

"What do you mean, sensitive?"

"Do you realize what clout those Glauben people have? Jus Chris, Hit, the House is in an uproar and the Lords are. . .are. . ."

"Crawling the walls."

"That's right, Hit. They're walking the ceiling. And the Minister is shaking the bars."

"That's your problem, Big Man. I'm not in politics."

"It *is* your problem, Hit. You blundered in there like the goddamned fool that you are, with both of your left feet in your ears—"

"Mouth," Borislav corrected.

"Mouth, Hit. Dammit, you should've told me about the aphro-fleece, the connection, I mean."

"I did, Big Man."

"Well, then, dammit, you should've told me about the economic value of that trade."

"You knew that, Big Man."

"Well, dammit, Hit, why didn't you tell me that fifteen hundred Concession executives would show up on Pappa? They're tramping all over the planet. In the House, the Lords. They sit in the offices of every Underminister. All you see around here is Glauben executives in those blue gravity suits with thick pads of lead on their feet. Goddamned, Hit, you should've told me!"

"What's that got to do with the Eco-Convention?"

"The what?"

"The Eco-Convention."

"Oh, for Chris' sake, Hit. Wake up to reality. You realize that that steam is building for a regional amendment to the E-C in the House? The Lords will go for it unanimously. You heard me, Hit. Cease and desist. I want orders to stop the killing. In writing."

"I'll give the orders, Big Man. But System East can't amend the Eco-Convention. That's unconstitutional. Section 209, remember?"

Big Man's fury could almost be heard. His sputters seemed to moisten Noball's brain. "That's not for *you* to determine, Hit. That's a matter for the General Counsel. Do as I say. I've got to run. All I've done these past four days is fend off Glauben executives. There's another one shuffling toward my office now. Miss Gitta, ask the gentleman to wait. Hit, today it's the Deputy Assistant Underminister. They're going



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to meet him—to appeal your inexcusable actions. And they'll keep on going to the very top. I know these types. Tomorrow the Assistant Underminister. And day after tomorrow the Underminister. And then you know *who*! See what schlock you've got me into? I'm climbing the cage."

"Well, Big Man, when you see Minister East, tell him to veto the bill."

"In writing," the Big Man snarled, and suddenly there was only a hum in Borislav's head.

Borislav understood the not-so-subtleties of bureaucratic slithering. The Glauben program was threatened! Well, by Jus, he'd do something about it. "Let's assume that the Minister's heart is stout," he muttered. "Let's assume he won't try to wiggle through the meshes of the law. Let's assume he's a *great* man, tough but fair and warm and human and all that."

Boris calculated his chances. Could he arrive in time? Yep, he decided. And within the hour he was on his way to Pappa in a fast Time Collapse scout. But before he left he went back to the quonset. He took a crumpled piece of yellow paper from the vast clutter on his desk. In a writing so tiny only the souped-up hand of Noball could render it, he wrote the following words in a corner: *To TF-STAC Glauben. Order: Stop killing the rats forthwith.*

He dated the slip and signed it PAC. Then he carefully shuffled it under the litter.

"My secretary is efficient," he muttered to himself. "Surely she'll find it."

SUCH a man was grandfather Borislav Hit.

Now you'll be surprised to hear what Borislav did. Remember that he was still in his artibod, and when he landed on Pappa, he couldn't move about freely as he might have inside the original Quantromer who still breathed simublood not far from the planet of Glauben now many parsecs away. He had to do what the Glauben executives had done. After he'd been sterilized in the heavy-planet sector of Customs, he donned a blue gravity-suit. It had a generator on the back, just beneath the rump—a big, fat, ball-shaped tail. (The generator made it difficult to sit, but the grav-suit had been developed under a government contract and its manufacture was still heavily subsidized, so no one said a word.) It had shoes with thick lead soles, and the suit was so heavy, he shuffled along like any other Glauben executive. He filled his pockets with florins from Glauben and hailed himself a cab. The cabies jostled madly to give him a ride. The GE's had spread money thickly on Pappa, and they



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hadn't even neglected the cabs.

"To the Minister's tower," Boris growled, and his voice sounded strangely hollow through the suit's intercom. "Step on it."

Away they went.

You've never been to Pappa, so I'll give you a glimpse. Pappacappolus, the capital, a jewel by the sea. Towers, graceful and slender. Hundreds of thousands. From the spaceport white chalk mountains rise on the left; ultramarine lies the ocean white-capped to the right; and the towers stand in central splendor in between. The dominant tree-type is a willow weeping in the salty spray.

In the spacious, fountained square around the ministerial tower, cabs unloaded GE's—blue, boxy men whose face-glass threw back the sun. They shuffled into elevators. They rose up to the topmost floor. It rotated slowly at so great a height that you could look beyond the chalky mountains into Printout Plain where the Temple of Pappa Computer sat far away in a haze.

"Come in, come in. How do you do."

Flesh hands shook glove hands.

The Glauben executives shook their way up the hierarchical ladder beginning with Big Man and then on up through the long chain of command all the way past the Underminister and into a gigantic conference room. Pretty girls attached suckers to their suits and asked in oozing tones: "Coffee, tea, or Guru juice?"—the last in deference to Glauben, but only one of the executives opted for Guru.

At last all were seated (more or less comfortably) and the Minister came in flanked by the leaders of House and Lords.

He welcomed the blues in liquid Pantongue. Then each GE took from his pocket a framed holograph and set it up so that the Minister might see the face behind the mask. One of the Executives excused himself saying he'd inadvertently left his pic behind.

The Minister made a speech. The Chairman of the Glauben Concession made a speech. The faceless exec punctuated the Chairman's remarks with loud "Hear! Hear!s" accompanied by thumps of his thick glove on the table. He called "Hear! Hear!" at somewhat awkward moments: for instance when the Chairman said ". . .and let us assume for the sake of argument, Excellency, that the Breeding Stock is eradicated. . ." and once when the Chairman said ". . .we respect the Constitution, of course, but. . . ." The blues leaned together on their side of the table and whispered on private circuits. Big Man looked at the faceless exec and began to sweat.

If you've been expecting a loud debate between Minister East and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

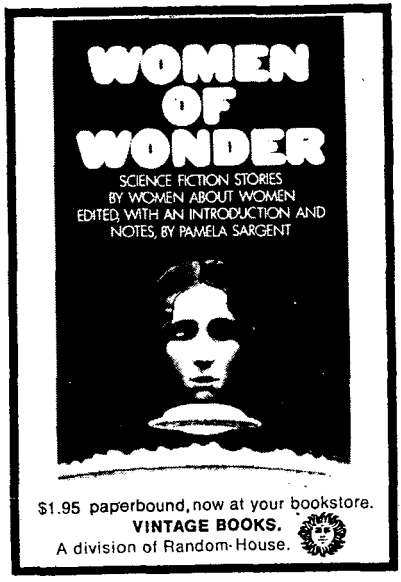
the GE's, teenies, you would be wrong—and in that case it is well for you to sit in the Whybar. No debate, of course. When the Chairman had had his say, the Minister East cleared his throat and replied as follows:

"Distinguished Chairman. If I understand your assessment, it is that *our* Constitutional lawyers see matters in exactly the same light as *your* Constitutional lawyers. To wit, since it is established that on the planet Glauben the species *rattus norvegicus* has thus far acclimated itself nicely and has not caused the type of ecodisaster which the Ecology Convention is designed, by prevention and—I stress—nonretroactive measures to forestall but—I stress—not to after-stall; therefore, it appears, the full force of the legislation may be said to be in a state of suspension or lapse."

The Chairman nodded his visored helmet.

(If you didn't understand the Minister, he said, in effect: "We'd like to help you, Chairman, and so let's just say that the law isn't applicable to your case.")

The Chairman nodded and replied: "We claim more than that, esteemed Excellency. We do not recognize the classification *rattus norvegicus*. No certainty exists that the animal we call *rodentus glaubenicii amoris* is an import. The reports filed by your agent, Borislav Hit, which your people were gracious enough to put at our disposal—"




"Hear! Hear!"

"—make claims and draw deductions we cannot possibly approve. Your man Hit, for example, speculates that *amoris* is *norvegicus* because the same diseases are associated with the former as with the latter. Now that, Excellency, is not established fact. Agent Hit cites no laboratory proof. In fact, Excellency, we rather question the competence of your agent, who spent his first week on our beautiful planet composing love letters of such. . .of such. . . I have no words to characterize them, but



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

permit me to read to you a sample—"

The Minister interrupted hastily. "That won't be necessary, Mr. Chairman. In fact, our own technical people have emerged with conclusions very much like yours. And in this connection, let me say that Eastern Quadrant's Quadrennial Economic Report outshines that of all other sectors thanks largely to the productivity of your planet. Such economic prowess, Mr. Chairman, is completely inconsistent with violations of law. We can only infer that our agent has made a mistake. Both the House and Lords have approved by nearly unanimous vote amendments to the Eco-Convention, and the document lies here before me for signature—"

Thump, thump, thump went the heavy glove of the faceless executive on the polished surface of the table.

"Minister," he cried in a loud, hollow voice, "surely you know Section 209 of the Eco-Convention which expressly forbids regional amendments? As the representative of the Southwestern Ratcatchers' Association, I regretfully bring this to your attention—not because it will benefit the SRA, mind you: it'll wipe us out! But because my constituents are men of law and honor, and we cannot allow you to make a serious error. Therefore I respectfully request that you submit the bill unsigned to System Central for ratification."

An uproar of voices.

"Your Excellency, I protest—"

"Who is this clown?"

"What's *in* that suit?"

"I've never heard of the SRA."

"Sir, we'll check this, this *gentleman's* credentials this instant."

This last was said by Big Man himself who rose and gestured, pale of face and sweatbeaded with bureaucratic agonies.

But before the armed attendants could make a move, the faceless Glauben executive suddenly rose and disappeared through a panel of wall where none of the GE's until then had suspected a door. He moved with the speed and resolution of someone with a souped-up body. Guards bounced against the panel, but it had been locked again from the other side.

THE Glauben executive knew his way about the building and he went straight to a lower floor where Big Man's offices were located, thinking, rightly, that no one would seek him there. He shuffled into the reception area and looked through his face-plate at a charmingly juttable fem behind a desk.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said, "are you the secretary of Borislav Hit's supervisor?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The girl nodded with shy lashes.

"I've come to make a complaint about that swine. Hit is the most repulsive, insensitive, vicious rascal I've ever run into. Let me tell you—"

"Sir," the girl cried, and her shy eyes flashed a kind of fire, "I'm only a secretary around here, but I can tell you *my* opinion of Borislav Hit—he's the finest, most competent, kindest, fairest, sweetest man who ever. . . ."

Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked down.

"Well," cried the Blauben executive, and now there was a curious catch in his voice. "Well, well. . . ."

But when the girl looked up, the executive was gone.

## IV

GATHER around closer, youngsters, and let me conclude my tale. Let me skip over Borislav's escape from the ministerial tower and the planet, and let me say merely that Pappacappolus had underground tunnels for transportation, water, waste, and so forth, and in a pinch Borislav didn't mind swimming through sewage, especially not in a gravity suit. And let me say further that he had many friends in STAC, people who had little love for Big Man or his excellent superiors, and so Borislav was conveyed back to Glauben in a Black Market sort of way, incognito, as it were. On the way Big Man called him on the communicator built into Noball's head, and Borislav swore the most solemn oaths that he was on Glauben that very moment. He described the landscape to Big Man in the minutest detail—while actually staring out over the spiraling luminosity that space assumed through the port holes of a TC jumper. Big Man didn't believe my granddad, but he didn't press him very hard either. Big Man had scored a triumph of sorts and his mood was elated. Also, Borislav was dangerous in his erratic way. Any man who'd do this, by God, might go all the way to System Central. You had to treat him with a pinch of caution. No use driving the man up a tree.

Furthermore, let me skip over the conclusion of that conference in the ministerial auditorium with its gorgeous view of Computer's Temple in Printout Plain—except to say this much: The faceless executive truly rattled the Minister's cage, in a manner of speaking, and the leaders of House and Lords began to grow nervous, and the Chairman of the Concession also felt a twinge of fear. They huddled in a tighter circle and nervously sucked coffee and tea, the Guru drinker having departed. Here was a dilemna, and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they solved it like this: The amendment had to go, clearly. Now that a threat had been sounded, the Eco-Convention had to be respected. But how? How do that and yet protect the trade whose profits made EQ's Quadrennial Economic Report such a shiner? They talked at length, weighing options, each as dreary as the next. At last Big Man had a brilliant idea. "Why don't we study the problem in greater depth," he suggested, and at his words a great excitement trembled through the people. A creative suggestion finally! Study the problem, indeed! Determine all the unknowns. Yessir! "Alphonse," said Minister East, "that's a darn good suggestion." 'Alphonse,' the Minister had said, using Big Man's first name—certainty of a promotion to Deputy Assistant Underminister at least. Big Man relaxed and expanded his chest. The Chairman agreed. Superb idea. Su-perb! In the meantime, of course, business had to go on as usual. How could you study the problem if the problem had been solved, right? Right, everyone said.

And so an official order went out calling off TF-STAC. It arrived, in writing, the same day Borislav landed on Glauben and resumed his duties in the quonset hut. His secretary had failed him. For reasons unfathomable in an organization as efficient as the Special Technical Assistance Corps, she had overlooked his order, and the killing had continued. In fact, when Boris walked over to Ratticide Central, he saw that the red bars on the graphs had almost caught up with the black. But now, official orders in hand, he had to call off the operation. There was no alternative. Borislav was a member of STAC. He obeyed. He didn't keep score.

He sat down before the central communicator and activated the All Channels button.

"All Points," he said to the device. "All Points, this is Borislav Hit, Planetary Agent in Charge. We have orders to terminate the termination immediately. You will stop operations in an hour and return to home base."

One junior colonel in the Southwestern district radioed back in astonishment.

"How can you order that, PAC? We still have several million to go."

"Never mind," Borislav answered. "The rest will die of grief."

He didn't keep score, but he was sad. He asked his pilot to drop him off on the outskirts of Cosmopplis, and from there, left alone, he walked through the city engaged in a muttering conversation with Noball. He circled the neighborhood where people now lamented in ratless grief behind the wire fence. He circled by the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ocean where surf had wiped out the last tracks of *norvegicus*. He gazed out over the wine-red sea to the bell buoy in the distance and listened to its mournful clang. Then he checked in again at the Grand Hotel and asked for his old room back, eager to be alone with the thoughts he'd sent to Ita Gitta from that narrow table. That night the chamber maid came in. She recognized and reported him again. And thus it was that Concession found PAC for the ceremonial farewell dinner they had staged.

It was a gala affair, and Borislav put a cheerful face on it. He even tried a toast or two after a few bottles of the local wine had thoroughly confused Noball's head. He lurched and staggered at the podium and made something of an ass of himself, his beard all beaded with wine. At the end, when the Chairman gave him an unusually large and beautiful aphrodisiac fleece, carefully sealed into a plastic cover, he forgot to shake the Chairman's hand and just careened out of the hall to the half-derisive applause of the Concessionaires.

The next morning, however, aboard the shuttle, just before departure for the SSS Bod Boat to pick up Quantromer again, Borislav cracked the seal on his farewell present and got such a whiff of aphro-scent he quickly sealed the thing again. "Ho, boy!" he whispered to Noball. "If I ever get the three of us together—me, Ita, and this rug! Ho, boy, Noball. That'll be something."

Let's skip the trip and see Borislav as he stood, once more, on the edge of the simublood pool. He had undressed Noball to his incomplete nakesness, had attached a weight to his leg. Now the two of them stood and waited for a signal from the man behind the glass to show that the psychomagnet was ready and operational. At last the attendant signaled, and Borislav turned to Noball, in a manner of speaking.

"Good-bye, old friend," he said, in a voice that was now entirely his own yet still a vibration in Noball's throat—and in a voice that had a cargo of feeling. "Good-bye, old buddy. You're not a bad sort. Maybe we'll meet again. But tell those bio-boys to make you a better tummy, hear?"

Then he jumped in.

ONE last time the Taler touched his pipe and let smoke curl up into the air. One final time Millusion burned in the braincells of the teenies gathered around him in the B-Deck Whybar of the Time Ark bound for New Frontier. Once more the Taler resumed his yarn.

Now we're back on Pappa, children. Borislav's arrival coincided with the sunset, and the chalk mountains were red, the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ocean purple. He muttered his way through sterilization. "Just don't put on any airs, Quantromer Hit," he said to his body. "You've had it nice, friend. Poor Noball, now, he went through all sorts of hell with me, he did. So you just keep still, will you. Don't tell me how 'deprived' you are. All will be well, I think. How can she resist that smell, now? That's what I'd ask you."

And Borislav made for a bank of telbooths and picked himself one. Quantromer's fingers trembled over the digits, but to Borislav's great joy and relief, Ita Gitta came on the screen. She dropped her lashes when he said hello.

"You're back," she murmured.

"Did you get my letters?"

"Yes," she murmured. Her eyes were wary.

"Ita," he said, "I've got to see you, even if it's only for five minutes." He fingered the plastic of his aphro-pelt, just retrieved from Customs five seconds ago. But he kept it out of her view, below the screen.

"Boris," she said, "you wouldn't have any ideas, now, would you?"

"None, dearest," he swore with feeling. "None whatever. I just want to say hello; you know, a handshake."

"Fine," she said; her voice trembled a little. "A handshake."

"Be right over," he husked into the screen, and he ran off in such haste that he forgot to sign off.

Ita Gitta lived in a tower in the foothills of the mountains, and the trip to her place took far longer from Borislav's perspective than the forty minutes it actually consumed.

They drove up a snaking road lined with willows weeping, up toward the fine blue residential tower where she had an apartment on level twenty-six. He threw money at the driver. He raced into the lobby and through it to the elevators. He fidgeted in the lift itself, which wouldn't move fast enough for him. He burst out even before the sliding doors had completely slid apart. He bounded down the carpeted hall.

But just before the door of her apartment, he suddenly stopped. With a sly grin beneath his bushy red beard, he carefully opened the plastic seal on his aphro-rug and—

And he was shattered with disappointment.

Now to understand his disappointment, you must go back in my story to that spot where I lectured on the Ecology Convention. You'll recall what I said to you. If you've ever landed on a planet, you go through one hellish purification. They bathe you, they squirt you, they irradiate you—that is how I put it, I believe. Every cell of your body is purified. The flora of *your* stomach must yield to the flora of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*their* stomach. I told you how they probe beneath your nails and massage your every hair with electronic fingers. Well, needless to say, they do the same with your belongings, and Pappa Customs had dealt with Borislav's jutting rug so thoroughly that the red root fungus that, interacting with rat epidermis, creates the aphrodisiac effect had been completely and totally eradicated, and the smell that now arose from the sack was that of musty rat skin.

Then as now, real aphro-fleece was difficult to come by. They were smuggled in, as a rule, or they came in through the hands of bribed Customs officials. And the real thing gave a kind of glamour to the pelts whose effectiveness was destroyed in transit or by time. But Borislav didn't know about such things, and he had been neatly finessed by the very Convention he strove to enforce with such ingenuity.

Well, you can imagine his dismay. Quantromer shrunk several centies. The sly, smiling face fell in and turned into a long, sad frown. But at last Boris pulled himself together. He was an agent of STAC, and agents of STAC picked themselves up. He rang the bell.

Almost at once the door flew open, and Ita Gitta's warm, soft arms embraced his neck (?), Ita Gitta's hot sweet lips sought his(!!), Ita Gitta's magnificent tities pressed against Quantromer's chest(!?), and her eyes bathed his beard with beads of tears, and her voice husked with longing and affection, and in short, broken phrases she said, more or less, that she loved him, that she loved him more than anyone else in the Cosmos. . .such letters. . .such poetry. . . .

When she pulled him into the apartment, Borislav let the jutting rug drop from his grasp. It lay outside on the thick carpet of the hall while inside, unaided by rat or fungus, my forebears did what they would do many times in a long and very fruitful marriage.

And so ends my story. Any questions?

Rubeema said: "Taler, what is *xenopsylla cheopis* and what is the *rickettsia typhi* that it carries?"

The Taler answered: "I knew you'd catch me on an omission, Rubeema, you always do. Little xeno is a rat flea, and ricky-tippi is murine typhus fever, a disease. But to that the Glauben people had become immune. Next?"

Francisco asked: "Taler, whatever happened to that study Big Man suggested they carry out?"

The Taler said: "It is still underway. Next?"

Rubeema asked: "Taler, what is the moral of this story?"

The Taler answered: "Moral? Children, I'm a Taler; I tell stories. Who am I to moralize?" ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE FACT

# A STEP FARTHER OUT

JERRY POURNELLE, Ph.D.

## ABM, MISSILE EATING LASERS AND A BI-POLAR WORLD

THE TOPICS for these columns come from discussions between Editor Jim Baen and myself. This one is at his request—but the opinions in it are mine. Jim shouldn't be held responsible for my views, only for believing the subject important.

When I first began work in aerospace I was part of a group known as Human Factors and Reliability, and it says a lot about the status of both fields that they were lumped into one rather small outfit under a single supervisor. Now both are pretty big stuff in both aerospace and other industries, but in those days they were an afterthought.

It turned out to affect my whole career, though. Although my primary work was in the human factors laboratories (I have probably cooked more people than anyone not a cannibal by profession) there was always reliability work to be done, and I had that reliability-engineering background on my record.

One route into "systems engineering" used to be through reliability. (Two others were physics and economics; it was thought that physicists and economists were uniquely qualified to look at the "big picture".) Consequently, when I moved up the aerospace ladder I ended up in systems design work, and that took me over into "requirements."

The requirements game is a tough one. The theory is that one analyses what tasks ought to be performed, and comes up with concepts for systems to perform them. The real design engineers work on these, and if they're lucky they sell the idea to a cus-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tomer. In aerospace the customer was generally the US Government, particularly the Air Force or NASA.

Requirements analysis can't be done in a vacuum. The analysts must know what's possible within the time span of their forecasts. It's no good saying "we need a system to deliver a million metric tons across fifteen astronomical units at cost of no more than $100 a ton. IOC (Initial Operating Capability) should be no later than five years from date."

We might *need* such a system, but anybody turning in that kind of report would find himself with a mandatory appointment at Central Medical. On the other hand, a proper requirements *should* take account of realistic expectations in technology. It's perfectly permissible to do a system predesign assuming that certain areas of research are going to pay off.

In fact, if the funding agencies buy the requirement analysis, they may well put more money into the necessary research—so long as you can convince them there's a good chance the desired capability will exist when needed.

This is a very complex subject and I wouldn't go into it if it weren't a requirement for this column. However, any discussion of Anti-ICBM (ABM) systems is a kind of requirements analysis. Besides, it provides a good background incident.

Requirements teams generally get the best information on present and expected capabilities of exotic systems, and ours was no exception. Naturally the space systems requirements group was vitally interested in lasers as early as the late fifties. About 1960 we received a briefing from engineers who had given lasers a great deal of thought.

Their conclusion was that lasers were interesting for communications, and had a potential for rangefinding and the like, but their utility for aircraft and spacecraft interception would be nil. They argued from efficiency.

Lasers in 1960 were much less than 1% efficient. Any airplane-eating laser would necessarily use a great deal of power, 99% of which would stay within the laser.

We can't possibly dissipate that much energy, and even if you make a *fantastic* assumption and plan on lasers an order of magnitude better, you still can't do it; and besides, efficiencies an order of magnitude better just aren't in the cards.

That was 1960. I am told that as of September 1974 the airplane-eating laser was declassified. Since I've no clearance and haven't had one for some time, I've no idea how long they've existed, but it must have been for a while. It seems that our estimates—which were the very best obtainable in 1960—were not



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only wrong, but drastically so. In something less than 14 years the impossible was invented, and it changes the whole strategic environment.

THE STORY is told that when John F. Kennedy first took office as President, he asked the Commander in Chief of the Strategic Air Command (CINC-SAC; I apologize for the alphabet soup, but it's obvious why so many initials are used in this business) to review the battle plan in case there were war.

He was given a review of the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), in which each component of the strategic force had a definite mission. Some were to attack interceptor bases in order to allow others to get through. Tankers rendezvoused with bombers in many unlikely places. The sub marines launched their birds. The whole force went as soon as the order was given, and the result was destruction of the potential enemy.

Kennedy was horrified. "General," he is supposed to have said, "you don't have a war plan, all you have is a kind of horrible spasm." One of the first tasks given Secretary of Defense (SecDef) McNamara was revision of the SIOPs to give the President "strategic options". The new doctrine was to be called "controlled response," and the big buzz words in those days were "flexibility" and "flexible response."

It didn't work. Although the name has been changed, our strategic war plan to this day is no more than a "horrible spasm". Today our strategic doctrine is called "Mutual Assured Destruction" (MAD) and mad is what some analysts think best describes it. The idea is that we kill them and they kill us and since each knows the other can do it, nobody will start the Big One in the first place.

Given the MAD doctrine, the primary requirement of US strategic forces is "Assured Destruction" (AD): the capability to absorb the enemy's best attack and launch sufficient weapons to penetrate his defenses and assure the destruction of the potential enemy to some unacceptable (to him) level.

Now that level may have to be quite high. The Soviet Union, as an example, took some 30% casualties in WW II and survived; and strict Marxist doctrine says that no level of casualties is too high if the outcome of the war is the destruction of the bourgeois societies and the final victory of socialism. It's no good saying that no sane man would *really* believe that, either, because some pretty influential people over there have come out and said it.

The requirement then is for an AD force that can survive and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perform its mission. ("Perform its mission" is euphemistic for "kill most of the enemy's civilian population and certainly cripple his leadership, military capability, and industry".) It can do this in several ways. One is to have sufficient defenses for our weapons-systems (not for our people) to assure the temporary survival of the AD force. Another is to have an AD force so large that it can't possibly be successfully attacked.

A final method is to launch the AD force as soon as you're sure you're being attacked. This is by far the *cheapest* way to fulfill the requirement—so long as you're not at war. It's pretty expensive if you've saved money on weapons and then couldn't afford to wait and see who launched what at you, and what it might do to you.

I know of almost no one who likes the "launch on early warning" solution, although there are economizers who seem determined to force us into that no-option position. If we reject this position, there remain proliferation of offensive systems; construction of defensive systems; or a mix of the two.

Proliferation of offensive systems is generally called "overkill", and isn't terribly popular. Now if you buy any part of the deterrence argument, there has to be some on-going improvement of the offensive capabilities in order to match threat requirements; not only must the AD force be able to survive and penetrate, but all potential enemies must *believe* it can do that. This is the usual argument advanced for the "triad" concept of missile subs, land-based missiles, and manned aircraft.

The triad is supposed to make our AD capability credible. *Something* is bound to get through, or so the argument goes. At bottom it's offensive system proliferation, which is demanded by the AD requirement, which is a direct consequence of the MAD doctrine. Naturally it results in "overkill" in that the force before losses must be many times more capable than the minimum that has to get through to perform the AD mission.

The alternative is defense. Critics of ABM generally have two arguments: (1), it won't work, and we'll have wasted a great deal of money for nothing. This school includes not only those who don't like any form of defense spending but also a number of Air Force generals—who'd rather put the money into more missiles and airplanes. It also includes some strategists who say "nobody ever won a war with defensive systems."

The other anti-ABM argument is that it *will* work. If it does, they say, we won't have a MAD situation at all. The potential enemy won't hold the US popula-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion as hostages. He will therefore have two choices: either start the war at a favorable opportunity without warning, hoping to smash our AD before it can be launched, or, more likely, start R&D efforts to develop systems that can defeat our defenses.

His R&D efforts are, it is said, bound to succeed. Modern weapons are so destructive that it doesn't take many getting through to kill everyone off. Therefore, when it's all finished, we'll have a useless ABM system, the enemy will have new offensive weapons, and both of us will have spent a very great deal of money for nothing.

The ABM, it is said, will at best "trigger a new round in the arms race." It will absorb funds we need for better things. Oddly enough, critics of ABM generally have their own ideas of what we should do with the money "saved" by not building ABM, and I know of none of those who wants that money left in the pockets of the taxpayers. Thus the strategic argument generally gets complicated by debates about the social desirability of various schemes of national self-improvement, and those who favor ABM are often accused of ignoring vital problems which should "come first."

In addition to the above positions, all of which more or less accept the MAD doctrine to some degree, there are those who reject MAD and want to see an entirely new strategic concept govern force requirements. The most obvious of these is pacifism in one or another form. While philosophically respectable, and in my observation fairly popular among science fiction fans, pacifism will get no discussion here because at the moment it's simply not a realistic alternative. The American people don't buy it, and the liklihood of a pacifist Congress in the near future is vanishingly small.

Another position was "assured survival", which I didn't invent, but I will claim credit for naming. It's discussed at some length in a volume by S. T. Possony and J. E. Pournelle; THE STRATEGY OF TECHNOLOGY, New York, Dunellen, 1970. The idea was that our goal ought to be not the destruction of the potential enemy but the survival of the United States, and it accepts deterrence only as a temporarily necessary evil.

There are two main arguments for assured survival as a goal. The first is obvious: it's common sense. The second is moral: the Judeo-Christian concept of Just War does not include the killing of harmless civilians, *certainly* not as the primary military objective.

The AS doctrine, then, generates a different force requirement from MAD. Emphasis would be placed on defensive systems to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

protect not only weapons, but people; and offensive systems would be tailored for use against military targets for destruction of the enemy's war capability.

There were two main arguments against AS in my day. The first was technical: you can't do it.

The second was moral-philosophical: you don't want to do it if you can, because AS assumes there *can* be nuclear wars, and if there can be there will be. Furthermore, the argument goes, by removing the US population from its status as hostages, we create the possibility that the US will start the war; the enemy knows this, and thus he is tempted to start it at any favorable opportunity.

That argument can be and was carried to the extreme of saying that any attempt to build fall-out shelters in the United States was/is an aggressive act against the Soviet Union. (For some reason those making that argument never comment on the mandatory civil defense training every Soviet citizen undergoes, or the extensive shelter program in the USSR.)

Finally, it was/is said, AS will again trigger another round in the arms race, so that at the end we'll be no better off than we were, we'll have spent a lot of money, and both sides will have more weapons—all to no benefit.

EDGAR author of DAVY and MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS
PANGBORN
his most devastating novel yet . . .
The Company of Glory
Atomic war has reduced the earth to a primitive state — history is no longer written . . . plagues and radiation death are common . . . Demetrios, the former Adam Freeman, remembers what life once was and tells a new generation of earthlings the terrifying tale of a world devastated by the Twenty Minute War!
PYRAMID PAPERBACK
$1.25 (V3568) available at your local dealer, or send $1.25 plus 25¢ for postage & handling to PYRAMID GMO Dept., 9 Garden St., Moonachie, N.J. 07074.

I hope the above is a fair summary of strategic debate as it was prior to September, 1974.

In my judgment, the missile-eating laser has changed the strategic environment considerably, and *should* "trigger a new round" in the arms debate.

From a technical view the laser is an ideal ABM. One of the big problems with ABM systems was that you had not only to locate an incoming ICBM, but track it, guide an interceptor to it, and detonate a weapon to kill it. Tracking is horribly difficult, decoys can exhaust the supply of interceptors, and the defensive



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weapon so contaminates the defense environment that you have trouble seeing through your own weapon effects to get at the next bogie.

With lasers none of this applies. The ability to detect is the ability to kill, since the lethality travels at lightspeed. Also, the laser is not a one-shot weapon, and thus we need not be so concerned with discriminating between decoys and the real thing. Also they can slew rapidly to cover a large area. (The laser itself doesn't point, of course; a mirror does all that.)

Thus, at least in theory, much of the technical argument against Assured Survival vanishes if laser ABM's are feasible. What of the moral-philosophical objection?

First, assume it's all true, and that having spent the money to develop a laser ABM we find that the enemy has come up with an ICBM system that can penetrate it; we're back to MAD. Have we gained nothing?

We've gained a great deal. First and foremost, at the end of that round of the arms race there will be only one potential enemy. *The Soviets may be able to develop penetrators, but no one else will.* [Italics mine.—Ed.] Soviet aircraft and ICBM's may be a threat, and we may be in a MAD situation vis-a-vis the USSR, but we'll be hostage to no one else.

THAT MAY BE worth quite a lot; there are nations far more reckless than the Soviet Union and in a few years many of them will have both nuclear weapons and primitive delivery systems. At the moment we have exactly zero capability to protect ourselves from any ICBM, no matter how primitive.

It may be worth something to our friends, too. With a good ABM system we may not be able to protect ourselves and allies from the Soviets, but we can provide assurance against other military adventurers. After all, the US-Soviet *detente*, no matter how real, will not end international conflict.

The effects of a not-incredible defense reach far beyond the currently popular strategic issues. In my day we had a number of standard strategic problems, each identified with a self-explanatory name.

They included: The Mad Dictator with a Missile; the N-th Country Problem; Catalytic War (in which a third party attempts to trigger war between the US and the Soviet Union); The Crazy General Launching Two Birds; etc., etc.

All of these are, if not solved, at least affected by a strategy of Assured Survival based on laser ABM systems. If the crazy general launches a bird, it can be shot down; we won't have to worry about this being the initial



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shot of a pin-down attack. Pin-down, incidentally, is no joke: it's an attack that uses a few weapons detonated at intervals over the enemy's (or our own) missile farms to keep the birds from rising until a massive attack can arrive and kill them in their holes. With many warheads per missile, if we see one bird coming in we can't be sure it's *not* the first stage of pindown.

Incidentally, the Catalytic War problem may be more real than you might think. A few years ago a fanatic faction within a nation allied with the US actually plotted to trigger a US-SU war. The conspirators were caught by their own intelligence agencies. They included some pretty influential people.

So there are some real benefits to an ABM system, even one that won't stop the Soviets. Mutual US and SU deployment of such systems would create a bi-polar world, which may or may not be preferable to a situation in which there are several, to dozens, of triggers that could start WW III. I think it would be.

AND BEYOND all that we'd have the lasers themselves! A rocket interceptor isn't worth very much beyond its designed purpose, but a big laser is valuable. Among other things it could be the heart of the laser orbital-systems launcher I described last April (HALFWAY TO ANYWHERE; *Galaxy*, April, 1974). *It could be the key to the planets.* [*Italics mine.—Ed.*]

Then too, a major component and large part of the expense of a laser system is power plants. These would be useful in peacetime since the lasers won't need the power. I don't think I need say a lot about the advantages of energy self-sufficiency.

There are, in other words, a number of benefits to a laser-ABM system benefits that go far beyond the issues now debated. I'll freely admit I'd like to see the lasers themselves developed indepedently of the defense requirement. In my judgment the resulting cheap access to space would itself be worth the investment.

In fact, I think economical access to space will bring such a wealth of technological benefits that we'll be able to afford many of the social programs now advanced as preferable to defense spending—and I also think it unlikely that we'll buy the needed research except as part of a defense package.

I've given up believing myself infallible. Still, I've looked at the problem for a number of years, and my present analysis convinces *me*. I think we ought to adopt Assured Survival as our goal; and that we should get to work on big missile-eating lasers. ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CHANGELINGS

## LISA TUTTLE

*The experiments in "Behavior Modification" now being carried out in places like San Quentin are only the beginning. . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RYAN TURNED away from the window, looking down and turning his glass so that the ice cubes spun. The house felt empty; the silence was not right. He knew that he should hear the soft sounds of his wife getting his daughter ready for bed.

Ryan felt lonely, and went to the portable bar for another drink. The bar looked like an antique wooden globe when it was closed. Ryan had bought it in Spain, where he and May had gone on their honeymoon, the year before civilian passports were revoked.

Annie walked in naked. ☆

"Annie," Ryan said, gently reproving. He set his glass down on the stereo and went to kneel beside her. Her hair lay in moist curls around her head, and there were tiny droplets of water all over her body. The damp patch on the carpet where she stood began to spread. She turned her brilliant blue eyes, her mother's eyes, on Ryan and said accusingly, "Mommy didn't come dry me off."

Ryan smoothed her damp hair. Russet, he thought, auburn. The loveliest words for the loveliest color. It reminded him of autumn. He pressed his face against her head, but she smelled of Ivory soap and childhood, not of apples or leaves.

She pulled away, putting her hands on her hips, and made a mouth at him, the way she had seen her mother do. "Daddy. It's my bedtime."

"I'll put you to bed," he said. "You shouldn't run around naked, you know."

"Well, Mommy didn't *come*. I was looked for her."

"A child."

Ryan and Annie looked up together. May stood in the doorway, her hair mussed, her face soft and slightly puffy, as if she had been asleep.

"There's a child, a little girl. Ryan?"

No, he thought, belatedly. He wished he had not been drinking, or that he had drunk himself into insensibility. But there was Annie.

"Annie, sweetheart—"

But she had run to her mother. "I waited and waited but you didn't come."

"Ryan?"

"Annie, sweetheart," Ryan said. "Run to your room and put on your jammies. Mommy and I will be in to kiss you goodnight in a minute."

"Mommy, why didn't you come dry me? Mommy? Why? Mommy?" Annie tugged at May's full skirt. Ryan caught the note in her voice that presaged tears. Poor Annie. She knew. She could sense it.

Dawning panic on May's face as she bent to enfold Annie's wet body to her. Her eyes did not



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leave Ryan's. "Oh, Ryan. This is—oh, Ryan—"

"Annie."

"Annie," May murmured. She stood up, holding Annie, and bent her face into Annie's neck. "Annie, Annie. Oh, Annie."

Annie threw her arms around her mother's neck and buried her face against her. But she said nothing. She was not reassurred.

"I'll take her to bed?" May asked.

"At the end of the hall."

"Wait for me."

Ryan sank into the couch and stared at the Van Gogh print on the opposite wall. Crazy old Van Gogh. He had cut off his own ear. Ryan wondered what they had done to him after that.

"Five years, Ryan. At least five years." May came and sat beside him on the couch, taking his hand between hers. "How old is she? Of course we called her Annie, after my sister, right?"

Ryan nodded wearily.

"This has happened before, hasn't it, Ryan? It's happened before? Has it?"

"Yes."

"But I don't remember! I don't! We were married, the two of us, together, here—" she touched the couch and looked around. "Here, in this house. But no Annie, no children. Oh, Ryan, what does it mean? How could I lose—five years? Or more? How could it happen? Why? What is it?"

"You just forget things," he said, very softly.

"But why? Always? Will my memory come back? Why?"

"The operation. It's something to do with that."

She stared at him in a panic and snatched her hand from his. "What op—I don't remember! What's wrong with me—is this me?" Turning her face away from him, she began to cry.

Ryan stood and went to the window where he stared out at the placid streets. The pools of light beneath each streetlamp were empty. The neighborhood was silent. People didn't go out much after dark anymore, though the streets were safer than they had ever been. He turned back into the room. May had stopped crying. She had never been one for crying.

She said, "When I was little my sister Annie told me that every seven years each cell in a person's body has been replaced. I guess I was about five then. It really worried me. She told me that every seven years you become a completely new person. A *different* person. I used to be afraid. I thought that when I was seven I wouldn't remember the old me. I thought that if my brain cells were all replaced then," she turned her palms upward into the air, "poof go my memories."

"But by the time you were seven you had forgotten about it.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Until Annie reminded you."

"I've told you this before?"

Ryan nodded.

"The last time I forgot? Is it like this every time?"

"Not exactly."

"How often? How long has this been going on? Have we been to the doctor?"

"More than one. There's nothing. . .nothing that can be done. It might be just an immediate reaction, and it should stop soon." But her periods of amnesia had been increasing in frequency.

"What operation was this?" May asked.

"Government sponsored for a better future."

She glanced at him sharply. "A volunteer thing?"

"Not in the least. People turned each other in—and then, of course, there were the criminals, and those on file as subversives."

"Of course. I was a subversive in college. A teenage radical. What did the operation do to me?"

"Made you a better, happier citizen. The object was to remove your destructive tendencies and install something, a tracer device so that if you should backslide, they could find you."

"Are you. . . ?"

"No. There's a new bill up, though, about 'testing for subversive and criminal potentiality' and if it passes, which it will. . ."

May stared at the floor. "I don't remember. I could have been in fairyland for the past five years. Or what Annie told me about being made new, or—"

"Or you could be a changeling."

She looked up. "How did you know—"

"That was the story Annie wanted?"

She nodded. "I told her no story tonight."

"But she never goes to sleep without a story."

"She was very good about it. Very quiet. She—I suppose she could feel there was something wrong, that I was different. I didn't even know what drawer her pajamas were in. Oh, Ryan, can't we do something? When will I be all right again?"

Ryan shrugged, caught her look of need. "I'm sorry, but it varies. A few hours or a few days."

"Never any longer?"

He shook his head. Last time it had been six days before her memory came back. The duration grew longer, and the time between occurances lessened. The first time she had been set back only to the time of the operation.

"Can we call a doctor?"

"I told you—"

"Oh, please, darling—just let's call Ben. It will make me feel better to talk to him. He knows about me?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ryan nodded. "I'll call him."

She leaned across the couch to hug him, and he pulled her to him, holding on tight.

May went back into the bedroom while Ryan called Ben. "I'll just lie down for awhile," she said.

Ben would come, of course. He was the family doctor and a long-time family friend. He promised to be by within an hour.

Ryan went into the bedroom. It was dark, but the curtains were open, and there was some light from the street. He saw the gleam of May's eyes.

"I didn't mean to disturb you," he said.

"I'm not sleepy. He's coming?"

"In about an hour."

"Oh?"

"I told him it wasn't an emergency. Really, darling, we can't just break up his whole evening."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be silly."

He went to the dresser, to the box that held the cuff-links and tie-clips he never wore, relics of a time past.

He took out a folded, brittle newspaper clipping and unfolded it by the window in a shaft of light from the streetlamp although he knew the picture well enough to look at it in the dark.

It had been a front-page photo. May's head was sandwiched between two others, leaning out of the window of an occupied building. A banner proclaiming the building's liberation stretched below them. Three arms thrust forward in jubilant fists. And May's face, smiling, alive, victorious. . .holy.

"For this," he said softly.

"Ryan? What are you—oh. I wish you'd throw that away. I don't like it." He turned and saw that she had raised herself on her elbows. "That's not me. It was a stupid, violent time that we grew up in. You had the sense then. . .I didn't. I'm a different person now, though. I don't know how I could have ever been like that. . .I can't even remember what it felt like."

"Of course you can't." He folded the paper and put it in his back pocket.

"Ryan? Come here." Her voice was shy.

"Not now," he said, as gently as he could, and left the room without touching her.

HE DIDN'T like the way the living room felt and knew the rest of the house would be no better. He felt like a deserter, but he went outside. He would walk for a few minutes.

Outside was no better. It was quiet and the air felt thick and still. He could taste the smog. He began to walk, hoping he would see someone to speak to, but he saw no one. He headed up toward



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the highway, towards a diner he had occasionally stopped in for a cup of coffee.

The diner, when he reached it, was empty except for the counterman, its emptiness made the more vivid by the merciless florescent lights shining down endlessly on all the hard, clean, bright surfaces.

"Evening," said the counterman cheerily. "What can I do for you?"

Ryan straddled one of the high brown stools. "Just a Coke. Thanks."

"This is a slow time," the counterman said. "Past the regular dinner hour, but not so late that other places are closed. You live nearby, don't you? We don't get many walking in—when I saw you didn't have a car I knew you must be from nearby. There y'are—anything else?"

"No thanks."

"Walk for your health?"

"I just wanted some air."

"Nice night for walking, I guess. Real warm for this late in the season."

Ryan wished another customer would come in. The counterman's persistant friendliness made him uncomfortable, and his physical appearance inspired dislike in Ryan: the shining head beneath thinning hair, the watery blue eyes, the horsey teeth beneath the stiff ginger mustache. . .Ryan turned his attention to the voice from the radio which was playing at the end of the counter. It was a news broadcast, full of hopeful messages about the state of the union. There was less and less coverage given to the rest of the world these days—no one wanted to hear about wars or crime.

The counterman seemed to follow Ryan's attention. "Gives you hope, doesn't it?"

"What."

"The news. It's all good now, or nearly. Just remember how it was ten years ago—or even five. People didn't go out on the streets—you wouldn't have gone out for fresh air unless you were crazy. You would have been beaten up and robbed. Mugged." He said the word as if it were foreign and he wasn't sure of the pronunciation.

"Thanks to the operation," Ryan said.

"That, and other things. The government finally cracking down on criminals. Democracy is great, but people have to *deserve* it. There were a lot of changes that had to be made."

"Did you have the operation?" Ryan asked.

"Me? No. I've always been a good citizen. I've always done my duty." The way the counterman looked at him made Ryan uneasy, and he had to caution himself against paranoia. The day May was in the hospital he had gone around all day suspecting people



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of spying on him, of being out to get him, of making accusations disguised as innocuous conversation.

Ryan realized that he was standing, fumbling in his pocket for change.

"I've got to be going," he said. "I didn't tell my wife I was going out—she'll worry—"

"But you didn't drink your Coke."

"I guess I'm not thirsty." He put a quarter on the counter.

The counterman pushed it back. "I won't charge you for it, then. Drink it myself." He smiled. "Have a good walk." His "Come back again" was cut off by the closing of the heavy glass door.

Headlights cut across Ryan's face as he turned up his driveway, and he felt the familiar paranoid beating of his heart as he realized the car was turning into his driveway just behind him.

"Ryan? Is anything wrong?"

It was Ben.

"No, no. I just stepped out for some air."

"Well, you stepped into the wrong place for it," Ben said, getting out of his car. "Phew. It stinks tonight. Supposed to clear by tomorrow, though."

Ben was one year away from compulsory retirement. He'd chosen to continue working through the past two optional years. They went into the house together.

"May's in the bedroom, resting."

"Fine." He scrutinized Ryan's face. "You shouldn't let this get to you, you know. I'm sure it's only some preliminary adjustment."

"Why don't you go in and see her." Ryan knew that Ben would catch the hard edge of dismissal in his voice, knew also that Ben would not be offended by it.

"Sure, sure," Ben said. He put his hand on Ryan's shoulder. "Take it easy."

Ryan sank into the couch, ignoring the voices that came quietly from the other room.

"She'll sleep now," Ben said when he came out of the bedroom. "Could I trouble you for a cup of coffee?" He followed Ryan into the kitchen.

"What did you tell her?"

"She just wanted to talk."

"She's sleeping, you said?"

"No, but it shouldn't be long."

"Why didn't you just turn her off?"

"I wouldn't do that, Ryan."

"Why not? You're a doctor; you should know all about implants. I turned her off myself, once. Accidentally. I was frantic until I found the place again to turn her back on."

"The little death," said the doctor.

"No. More like turning off and turning on a doll. Ben, they've taken my wife away from me and given me a docile robot-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

housekeeper. They destroyed her! Now she's losing her past—"

"It's nothing to worry about, Ryan. This whole business of the memory—it will pass, I promise you."

"How do you know? Maybe for some people—but when they're tampering with minds—it could get worse. She'll be nothing but a shell, without memories, and they'll reprogram her into a model citizen—that's what they—"

"Your voice, Ryan, lower your voice."

Ryan took a coffee cup and saucer out of the cupboard, his hands shaking.

"How did we let this happen, Ben? How could we? It won't stop. It was only the criminals at first—but they took my wife, my sweet, beautiful May just because she was on their bloody list."

"She wasn't harmed, Ryan. You're being overly dramatic. You must face up to the fact that May had certain. . .tendencies and beliefs that could be harmful."

"She never did anything! They forced her to have this op—"

"Calm down, Ryan. If May had had an illness you would have wanted it operated on, removed—"

"The analogy doesn't hold, *doctor*. May used to be interested and aggressive and very alive. She wanted to change things—she was a constructive person, not a destructive one. You've seen the change—you can't say it's for the better. I can't believe this is you, Ben, spouting—" Ryan stopped, comprehension dawning. "You. You've had the operation, too. You have an implant like May, haven't you, Ben?"

"Yes. Yes, I have. But don't you see—"

"Why you?" Ryan asked softly. "God knows you've never been a radical. What was your crime? Membership in the JDL?"

"I was against the operations at first. I thought that they removed the will. Now I understand—"

"Of course. And now you're a puppet as well."

"You're being paranoid. There is no great 'they' corrupting us—we run our own lives."

"Oh, we let it happen, all right. We wanted to burn out the badness in our criminals. Then in our potential criminals. Then in anyone who disagrees. Change their minds. Indoctrinate our children."

"Ryan, it's all for the good."

"It always is. The good of the State. Well, goddamn the State!"

"As your doctor and your friend I must advise you to stop this foolish talk. Get some sleep. Take a vacation. Don't worry so much."

"That's a great prescription. This country has gone to hell precisely because we've closed our eyes.

Ben turned away. "I'd better leave now."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ryan saw his own hand go out toward the back of Ben's neck. His fingers found it, pressed, and he caught Ben before he could hit the floor. The implant was in the same place as May's.

"How convenient," he murmured. He looked up from the sleeping Ben to see Annie standing in the doorway in a long blue nightgown, her little bare feet curling on the lineoleum as she watched in silence. In a year she would have to go to kindergarten, and they would begin on her, feeding her drugs for docility and propaganda in the name of education.

"Is Doctor Ben sick?"

"Just sleeping, hon. Run back to bed now."

"Can't sleep."

"Sure you can."

"No story," she said, widening her eyes at him. A finger went to her mouth, and she chewed it thoughtfully, staring at him.

"Run back to bed and Daddy will come tell you a story."

When she had gone he laid Ben down in some semblance of comfort. He thought about going to Canada. He had thought about it before. Things weren't much better up there, but in Canada and in the northwestern states like Washington and Oregon the underground was supposed to be strong. May had told him that, before the operation. They should have gotten out then, but when you've spent your whole life, as Ryan had, accepting and obeying, it was hard to give up everything and go.

If he went now he would have to leave May. He couldn't take her—the implant was part tracer and the police would have them back as soon as they were missed.

He went back into the bedroom.

"Darling? Has Ben gone?"

"Yeah."

"I didn't hear his car. I was listening for it."

"You should be asleep."

"I know. Is Annie still up?"

"Yes, she came out and saw Ben."

"Oh. I heard her—I didn't hear any other voices—I don't know, I thought she was playing with the phone. I must have been dozing."

"Of course you were. Go back to sleep. The sooner you do, the sooner it will be morning."

She laughed. "Like Christmas. If I wait for Santa, he'll never come. Ryan. . ."

He went to her, bent over, and kissed her. His hand went behind her neck and pressed, and her lips fell slack and asleep beneath his.

He went into Annie's room and helped her to dress, telling her that they were going for a ride.

"But it's late."

"Not for grown-up people. And you're not asleep, anyway. You like to go for rides."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," she said doubtfully. "Will Mommy come?"

"No. Mommy's sleeping."

"Like Doctor Ben?"

He looked down at her sharply. "You turned him off, didn't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You turned off Doctor Ben."

"What do you know about things like that? Where did you hear it?"

"I just know." Her eyes grew vague. She looked away. "Can I bring Raggedy Ann?" Ryan picked up the doll from the bedside table, where it slumped against the pink Princess telephone.

The streets were eerily empty. Didn't people go out anymore? Ryan turned on the radio in the car and settled into driving.

"The President spoke to the nation this afternoon, expressing his gratitude to the people of the United States for making such a drastic drop in the crime rate possible. Reminding his listeners that 'Eternal Vigilance is the price of freedom,' Mr.—"

Ryan punched the key for another station and got some bouncy, innocuous music.

"We learned that in school," Annie said suddenly.

"What?"

"Eternal vigilance."

"Annie, you don't go to school."

"Ballet school. I do so."

"You learned that in ballet school?"

"Miss Fontaine tells us lots of things."

"Not always about ballet, I take it." He had convinced May that ballet lessons would be more useful to Annie than nursery school. There were no more safe places.

"You shouldn't have," she said.

"What?" She was as uncanny as her mother about reaching into his thoughts.

"Done what you did to Doctor Ben. That's against the law. And the things you said to him. They were wrong, too."

How long were you spying on us?" Fat, ugly spiders were crawling up his spine. His sweat made him cold. He looked at her. She was leaning away from him, her face close to the window, fogging it with her breath and tracing lines with one finger. "Answer me!" Her left hand crept to her mouth at the sharpness in his voice.

"It was against the law," she whispered.

"Annie—" With an effort he gentled his voice, returned most of his attention to the road. They were on the freeway now, heading out of town, and there was some traffic. "Annie, you know your Daddy wouldn't do anything wrong. Sometimes the laws are wrong, and people must change them."

"People change laws by voting. People who break laws are sick and they must be helped." The



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

words were not hers; her voice was virtuous and intent.

"Does Miss Fontaine tell you that, too?"

"Nuh-uh. That's Sargent Dare."

"Who's Sargent Dare?"

"*You* know. On TV."

"The TV doesn't always tell you the truth, punkin. Life isn't that simple. The TV is wrong sometimes, but what your parents tell you—"

"Tell me a story. You said you would. Tell me the one about the changeling."

"I don't know that one."

"Yes you *do*. About how the fairies come and steal away the human baby and put a fairy child in its place—yes you *do* know it. Tell me."

"Not while I'm driving, sweetheart." Glancing down at her he saw that she was near tears. She should have been asleep long ago, poor kid. "Look, why don't you climb over into the back seat and lie down and go to sleep.

"Story first."

"You'll have to give me time to think of one, then."

"Okay."

But all he could think of was May, how she had been before, and the way they had changed her. Annie began to speak then, and he pulled himself out of bitterness to listen.

"On Sargent Dare there was this show where this boy's parents were very bad people." She was speaking to her Raggedy Ann doll, Ryan saw. She used that ploy often, dragging the doll into a room where her parents were occupied, and talking to it, meaning for them to hear as well. "They weren't really bad people, but they were sick. They had bad thoughts and so they broke the law. They broke the law a whole lot, but nobody knew about it except their little boy. Then he learned in school about the law and so he called the police and told them. He remembered the number.

"But don't worry, Raggedy, they didn't put his parents in jail. The police are our friends. They help us. They took his parents and did a little operation and made them happy. They came home and they smiled and they never broke the law again and they gave the little boy presents. And they all lived happily ever after."

THERE WAS A road block up ahead. A routine police check. One of the measures that was ridding the country of crime. Ryan had been through a dozen of them at least. He slowed the car, his throat tight.

He felt Annie sliding closer to him on the seat. She put her hand on his arm.

"We'll live happily?" she asked. "Happily ever after?" ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE SIREN SONG OF ACADEME

Lester del Rey

QUITE A WHILE ago some idiot came up with the idea that science fiction is a ghetto. That ideas has now become a clieché that far too many accept. Some, indeed seem to have accepted it so well that they have developed fears of pogroms to come and so have hastened to convert to the True Faith of the infallible mainstream. Or perhaps they have only become maranos. All of which shows that science-fiction's Chosen People should never trust the goyim.*

Two articles by writers from our field whom I always respect and often admire demonstrate how widespread the idea of a science fiction ghetto has become. Games Gunn began a guest editorial in *Analog* with that cliché; and Ursula K. LeGuin quickly got to it in her article for the December Forum in *Galaxy*.

Now Clichés are tricky things to use, even though I don't necessarily object to such harmless ones as "cold as ice." But they should always be re-examined by those who use them. Some, like "good a gold", are neither true nor harmless; gold is not good as a general investment in today's market—but those who automatically associate good with gold are flocking to lose their money on this unstable commodity. Clichés have a bad habit of being used as axioms—like the concept that the President is better than other men. There are a lot of people who still believe that, despite recent evidence to the contrary.

All right, let's examine just what a ghetto is. There's a good deal of argument about the origin of the word among dictionary authorities; but it's fairly obviously an Italian form (or respelling) of the Hebrew word *g-t*. (Hebrew uses a stem of consonants in which the vowels move around or change for shades of meaning.) A

*For those who know little of Jewish history, *pogroms* were reigns of terror against the people of the ghetto; *maranos* were those who claimed to convert, but secretly retained their previous faith; and *goyim* singular, *goy*) were the Nazarines outside the ghetto.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*git* was the paper a man of Old Testament days used to divorce—or put away—his wife. A ghetto is a place where Jews were put away. They were forced to live there, away from contact with true believers, and forbidden to be outside the ghetto after sundown. They were put away, and they had no option but to stay there. A voluntary ghetto is a meaningless noise.

Now just who put the writers, fans and general readers of science fictionaway? Who forbade them to associate freely with other readers and writers at any time? In what way were they banned, proscribed, segregated, cast out or put away?

I can't remember ever being kept from any kind of books or from libraries because I read science fiction. Nobody ever told me that I shouldn't read the old avant garde *Story* magazine—or the books by Cervantes, Hugo, Kafka, or even Joyce and Pound. My college literature professor didn't frown when I brought *Astounding Stories* into class; in fact, it was he who told me about the Balmer and Wylie serial in *Bluebook*.

And nobody else I've met among a rather large acquaintanceship of writers and fans seemed to have been kept from reading outside the field of science fiction either. In fact, I find that the readers of science fiction are often far better read than most other people I meet—including many of the college teachers I have known.

It's true that I was sometimes asked why I read "that trash." Curiously, the ones who asked were rarely among the people who read much better literature of any sort; the askers usually did so while buying their daily tabloid or their sports, detective or western fiction. (Incidentally, I also read a lot of those pulps; there was no discrimination about selling them to s-f readers.)

How about a ghetto for science fiction *writers*, though? Sorry, I never discovered that there was one. I wrote science fiction—and still do—more than other types of stories simply because I liked writing it more. But the ability to write isn't really divisible by categories, as all good editors know, whatever the self-termed critics may feel. I have usually reserved my real name for science fiction, but "Lester del Rey" was typed clearly on the first page of every manuscript regardless of byline—to make sure the check would come to me. So, whatever pen-name I used, my identity was never secret. Nobody rejected me because I wrote science fiction.

Examples: some time during World War II I happened to think of an idea for a slick story about a romance between two older people. I sent it off and got a check for it. I hadn't written a letter of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self-introduction to the editor, but he enclosed a note to me with the check, asking whether I was the same del Rey who wrote science fiction? Apparently he was a fan.

Much later, I sent a two-page outline for a historical adventure book to a major publisher for whom I'd never written. When they queried my agent about my writing experience, he simply cited some science fiction books. The editor didn't read that type of literature—but she accepted my work in it as sufficient proof that I could write; as a result, I got a contract without the need of sample chapters. Rather than a cause for being put away, my experience in the field has been a means of being accepted generally as a writer. I've written damned near every type there is (except for the long defunct love-pulp type), both fiction and non-fiction, and I've never found any editor who wanted to put me in a ghetto.

EVEN ACADEMIC circles have never seemed desirous of excluding science fiction writers. Quite a few from our ranks have been sought for and welcomed into the world of academe—with Philip Klass (William Tenn) as only one example. Certainly I was never excluded. More than twenty years ago, I lectured and taught quite often at various college and other writing workshops. And even when I was teaching mystery stories or general marketing, considerable emphasis was placed on the fact that I was a well-known science fiction author.

Of course, superficial study might indicate that the science fiction magazines were a sort of restricted group. They were usually clumped together in the stands. But things weren't that simple, even there. Back in the days before 1950—when there were a lot of fiction magazines—many of the general pulps featured science fiction. So did some of the slicks. And when I was first reading, I found much of the best science fiction in the pages of *American Boy*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper's*, to name only three. Nope, no real discrimination there.

In fact, there never was any kind of a ghetto for science fiction. There were specialized magazines for it—but in those days, there were specialized magazines for almost every interest. And many of the writers and readers tended to join together to promote their interest in the field. But if getting together sometimes in somewhat exclusive groups created a ghetto, then the finest example of a ghetto I know is the typical exclusive country club!

I've belabored the point about our "ghetto" because I think the term must be proved wrong. Too



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

many people who are setting themselves up to criticize and guide us have been using it. I think it's time we took a good look at them with a clear understanding of how easily they fall into error. And when anyone sets himself (or herself) up to examine our field critically—and then begins with a false major assumption about that field—we can damned well be suspicious of every other assumption! What kind of critic accepts a false cliché as a working datum about the subject being criticised?

I'm *not* opposed to criticism, in its fullest sense. For years, from a number of public platforms, I've been lamenting the dearth of good criticism. I'd like to see someone do for science fiction what C. S. Lewis did for the medieval romance—or for literature in general in his *Experiment in Criticism.* I'd like to see someone like Exra Pound use his critical scalpel on us. It would be good for us—and maybe I'd enjoy reading that criticism as much as I enjoyed the critical works of Lewis and Pound.

But I *don't* want criticism of our works or our attitudes that is based upon adjurations to open our minds to the truth—and is itself filled with the hoariest of bad critical judgment as to what we are.

I agree completely with James Gunn when he says: "If science fiction has any vitality, criticism won't kill it. . .so long as the writers do not accept the critics as final arbiters." In fact, I don't think the cant of criticism (as Sterne put it in *Tristram Shandy* more than two centuries ago), though it be most tormenting, can ever kill science fiction; that was proved by its resistance to the gibes of the critics during its first thirty years. But unfortunately, too many writers are beginning to write for the approval of the critics, rather than for themselves or their readers. Public reaction to a book is diffuse and slow to discover; but the words of the critic are direct and often quick. It's a temptation to write for those words, and try to make them pleasant ones. And even sadder, some of the publishers and editors on the book field seem to accept the critics as in some measure arbiters of what science should be. Criticism can't kill the field—but it can distort it, at least for a time, if it is misinformed or self-serving.

I agree that we need "literary feedback, criticism from sophisticated critics." We need critics who are thoroughly conversant with the great body of literature of all kinds *and who are also conversant with the body of science fiction.* The finest critic of wine may be a lousy critic of beer—or vice versa; a man who is steeped in the great classics may likewise



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be a lousy critic of science fiction without long familiarity with it—because the ways in which it does not conform will irritate his sensibilities so much that he may well not see the virtues that are unique to it.

But I cannot agree that we are about to get valuable criticism from the teachers whom Gunn seems to equate with critics. He says they tend to be enthusiastic, open, experimental. (Having talked to a lot of them, I'm not quite that enthusiastic, but let it go.) But are they knowledgable, capable of taste and judgment, aware of all the different types of science fiction, capable of assessing each according to its purpose? Most of them are not. Gunn admits that many do not know enough. But he passes that over by the comment that "every new discipline begins with *no* qualified teachers." That simply isn't so, unless by qualified he means qualified as a teacher by some university. In the first place, science fiction isn't a new discipline—it's almost fifty years old as a category—and older still if you count the many true science fiction stories published before the first category magazine. In the second place, almost every new discipline begins with the best possible teachers: the first ones to teach a discipline are the men and women who have discovered it; they teach others, who then teach the engineers who must make it work—who then set up the first regular teaching courses.

Of course some of the teachers who give the courses in science fiction are qualified by long experience with the field. I saw the list of books and outline of the course given by Professor Low at NYU a couple of years ago, and his approach was excellent in every way. There are a few other cases, including men who have not only read but written sf for years. (Gunn is a fine example.) But I've also been approached for help by teachers who obviously know little about the field—which wouldn't necessarily be bad if they were willing to read extensively and learn, but *is* bad because they usually feel that the field really requires no study of one who has taught "serious" literature. I've seen lopsided lists of books of every kind.

A few years ago, I went to lecture at a workshop conducted by a local college. The teacher did know something of science fiction, but didn't seem to care much for it. He grew increasingly unhappy as I answered a question from one student about the structure of a story that would sell to a magazine. When I finally used the nasty word *plot*, he could stand it no longer. "Oh," he broke in, "you're talking about what we call good story!" He sniffed in con-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tempt. "We don't teach that here."

Later, I had a chance to read a book he'd written. I could see why he didn't teach such things as plotting, structure, consistency, or sound motivation. He didn't understand them, hence had to hold them in contempt. His choice of reading material also showed that. He's still teaching science fiction courses.

I've also had the opportunity to read a fair number of articles and books on science fiction done by those who are teaching science fiction or hope to teach it. Most of the so-called criticism consists of trying to impose some far-fetched theory onto science fiction, trying to force it into some more familiar mold, or simple attempts at sticking some label or other onto it to replace "science fiction". Most of it is ignorant and misleading. In fact, one of the few bright spots was L. David Allen's *Cliff Notes*, which Gunn mentions. That was a good guide to the teaching of science fiction courses; but it was not (and wasn't intended to be) a work of criticism of the type science fiction needs.

LEAVING the need for critics aside for the moment, I'd like to see a far better job of teaching science fiction than I've usually observed. The average course among the *better* ones I know about seems to take the historical approach—start with older books and work forward. That might be all right for a true study course, but most of these courses are supposedly designed with less ambitious goals; Gunn rightly seems to value them for their ability to arouse interest in the field.

A majority of the students in most classes probably haven't read a great deal of science fiction. (Some have, and are taking it as a "snap" course. But they probably know more than the average teacher, anyhow.) The problem is to lead them to open their minds to this somewhat different literature. And for that purpose, the sensible program, it seems to me, would be to start the course with fairly simple but good stories, such as Heinlein's so-called juveniles, among which I'd recommend *Tunnel in the Sky* or *Start Beast*, or Clarke's *Sands of Mars*; then move up through van Vogt's *Slan*; and finally they can try reading Herbert's *Dune*, and so on.

Also, the emphasis should be on reading, rather than studying. Maybe the works of Tolstoy, Kafka and Joyce need to be studied; I wouldn't know, since I prefer reading to studying it —certainly when I first read it. And certainly most science fiction was meant to be read rather than studied; even in most of the better works the story is the thing because it was meant to be. Stu-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dents get into the habit of underlining passages, pondering over some "significant" phrase, etc. That only gets in the way of reading most science fiction. Save it for Hesse and Gibran.

When I was teaching a course in modern fantasy, I began with the announcement that I wanted no such nonsense, and that I'd downgrade anyone whose books were marked up. I also advised against taking notes in class. There were some heavy frowns from the class. But I think it paid off. At the end of the course, several students commented on being surprised at how much fun they'd had and at how many books they'd read. "You know, you were right," one young man told me. "Reading doesn't have to be work. It's even better than television sometimes."

I wish the teachers—or most of them—would make the same discovery. As a writer (in or out of any ghetto), I can ask nothing more than to be read for pleasure. I don't want to be studied. I once was introduced to an audience by a professor who had analyzed a fair number of my stories. He spent forty minutes telling the audience why and how I had done what I did. Then he left and I had the pleasure of spending another forty minutes explaining why almost every bit of his his careful analysis was totally wrong. However, I tried to be reasonably tactful; after all, my stories were in good company. He was wrong about the Bible, too. There is no Book of Exultations. I made that up (at the top of the last chapter of "For I Am a Jealous People") as a hint to the reader that mankind had won the war against God.

But maybe all this just goes to prove Gunn's point that we're suspicious of overtures from outside the field. I must admit that I'm very suspicious sometimes. Especially when those overtures include requests that I immediately sit down and supply the basic knowledge that will go into somebody's thesis; or when said overtures consist of invitations for me to come to some affair put on by academe and donate my services, thus assuring some measure of success for the work the overturer is being paid to do. I like a certain amount of brass in certain overtures but not that much, I'm afraid.

And I am suspicious of overtures from inside the field—to academe, perchance—when they contain bias and error against the field.

I'M ALSO in accord with Ms. LeGuin's rules that say science fiction must have intellectual coherence and scientific plausibility, as well as scientific competence. In fact, I'm in agreement with all the hundreds—including myself—who've repeatedly said



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that. But when she starts talking about the fiction of the "Golden Age," I'd like to find more historical coherence and plausibility. She says we know what sf was like in the Golden Age of Science Fiction. To wit, the young girl coos questions about the gadget. And Prof. Higgins "explains how it works for about six pages." Then enter the dauntless Star Captain, etc.

Sorry, Ms. LeGuin, I *don't* know it was like that in the Golden Age of Science Fiction—which ran more or less from 1938 to 1950. No, I can't remember it that way at all; I was reading it and writing it then, but I just don't remember it that way! The scene described did happen, more or less, in science fiction magazines; but it came from the birthing days of our literature. It was pretty well weeded out by 1934, and getting rare even before. Our writers had to learn how to handle fiction where new technology and new societies were in need of explaining in each story; but they caught on pretty fast, or the editors were rejecting all their stories by the beginning of the Golden Age.

Oh, there were some magazines where such schlock was published—but they certainly weren't the leading ones, by any means, nor were they the favorites of those most "ghetto-ized" among the readers. I wonder just what Ms. LeGuin was reading back in those days? Surely not the works of Heinlein, Asimov, Sturgeon, Simak, de Camp, or even myself, to name a few.

She also admits that "*recent* American sf has been full of stories tackling totalitarianism, nationalism, over-population, prejudice, racism, sexism, militarism, and so on."

Recent? I can recall stories dealing with every one of those things going back to the early thirties—and some before that. Science fiction quickly got over its anthropocentrism and stopped confusing form with degree of cirtue long ago. Indeed, one of its major values was spreading the doctrine that the "bad guys" didn't have to look different nor the "good dyas" look like us but that every race and kind could be either bad or good, and that this depended on its goals and motivations, not its form. Heinlein and I were writing science fiction for school libraries in which we had all colors and races—yes, and people who happened to be female—put in space long before Ms. LeGuin started writing. And we did it without making a big thing of it, but as something to be taken very much for granted. Too much of *recent* science fiction has done it in a way that indicates the writers are trying to be noticed for the "relevance", but that's not the way to get the best results.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AND now for escapism. I agree that the big question is sometimes whether you're escaping to values or from them. Good literature deals in values and the human condition, whatever the stage on which it's played. But I'd like to suggest that the poorest literature for escapism is science fiction. If you want simple escape, try the average western novel with its simplified code of values—or the sports story, where winning is the only value—or the detective tale, where all too often good is "us" and evil is "them" and nothing we do to them, no matter how ugly, is bad. Or try some of the regular books, where all human value is rejected, and a fool who does nothing and learns nothing except perhaps to have a few affairs and gorge on self-pity is considered worthy of 300 pages or more. Science fiction, which demands that the reader enter and accept many new ways of looking at the world, is perhaps the least escapist of all literature. Sure, it isn't for real—but neither is Faulkner nor Heller. If you want reality—at least one side of it—try Gorki.

Anyhow, what's wrong with escape literature, however you define it? Despite the mouthings of the crypto-Marxists (it is a purely Marxist doctrine that all art must serve other functions than "mere" art—this is an idea foreign to all previous concepts of artistic merit.) not everything in life has to have a Purpose and carry a banner inscribed with "I Serve!" There are lots of escapist activities that enjoy high repute, such as collecting coins, or playing chess. (Don't get me wrong; I think chess is a marvelously intellectual game—but it isn't of any more value to anyone or anything than is watching football, another bit of escapism.)

In fact that ancient "escapist" label is just another convenient cliché, one probably tossed (and properly so) at Rabelais and (even more properly, since he was trying to escape from his real impotence to punishing his enemies by make-believe) against Dante. It's like another label used much too carelessly: pulp. Pulp fiction is not necessarily bad nor necessarily good. Most of Conrad, Kipling, and I don't know how many other writers was published first in the pulp magazines here. Somehow, practically all of the "slick" fiction and most of the "quality" fiction of the same period is no longer read, and for good reason.

Maybe if more people would read C. S. Lewis' *An Experiment in Criticism*, they'd stop falling back on such trite devices. He took a careful look at what *and why* people read. If Ms. LeGuin is not familiar with the book, she should be. It's one of the lovely jewels that sometimes comes from academe.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ah, yes. There have to be some respectable writers, all from a list Ms. LeGuin points out as not being American. Curiously, I find Eddison missing from the list, so let me add him to Wells, Orwell (who wrote dystopias, not science fiction), Huxley (mostly ditto), Capek and Stapledon. (I refuse to add Zamyatin to the list.) I might point out that most of them were printed in the early science fiction magazines and somehow found their way into our ghetto world. But that doesn't matter. It's a good list. It supports the proper critical view that American literature doesn't amount to much, and that any really cultured view must be gained from European works.

The trouble is that these are works basically written outside the field of science fiction, deliberately meant to fit into the broad stream of European literature. I would never point to them to prove that science fiction, per se, isn't escapist. They have nothing to do with any criticism of what writers should be doing *now* in the field. Maybe we *should* write more like those books—but if we did, we'd have very small chance of getting our works published. Those books were written before the field was mined completely, and a writer can't go back to the beginnings after the beginnings are gone.

Nevertheless, there are some American books that I might point to as being far from merely escapist. There is Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia*, which dealt with many of the burning issues on the campuses today—but dealt with them early in the century. (It's at least as legitimately science fiction as Orwell or Huxley.) And there is Frank Herbert's *Dune*, dealing not merely with ecology but far more with a philosophy of man and progress. And there is indeed Ursula K. LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, which I consider a unique study of the nature of human love, worthy to stand beside any European literature, but beholden to itself alone. Let's not fall into the popular cliché among intellectuals that everything American is trash.

Of course, the guardians and acolytes of academe tend naturally to a conservative outlook in the humanities, which makes them suspicious of newer works and newer ways. This is quite proper for the needs of academe, and I respect them for it within their proper area. They must conserve the best of human achievements and attempt to instil a respect for and understanding of such works in their students, who tend to be impatient with anything not current. The very nature of their work demands a somewhat conservative outlook.

And similarly conservatived limits are demanded of those who evaluate and determine the best



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

current work. There is no sure guide to enduring value except time and hindsight; the success of those who have tried to make quick decisions on values has been woefully bad. Too many of the "great" works of one generation prove valueless to another. And too many of the relatively unnoticed works come to be appreciated properly only after many years have passed.

But that very conservativism must make the critics who serve in such institutions highly suspect when they attempt to evaluate or guide in something as new and multiform as science fiction.

BOTH THE articles under discussion seem to take it for granted that the criticism we will have from the world of academe will enable us to improve science fiction. But will they? What is their track record? They have been busy improving the novels of the mainstream for quite a few years; they were already at work on that, though less obviously, when I began reading criticism forty years ago. Lately, they've captured a fair amount of space in the largest-circulation review magazine, as well as in the more learned critical forums. Has the mainstream improved that much?

Not by what I hear from academe! I keep hearing that the novel is either a dead or dying form. Could it be that all their improvements have simply turned a healthy creation into a moribund one, *even in their own judgment*? If that's the improvement we can expect from them then I, for one, want no part in it. If superior fiction is based only upon the essential tragedy of Man, then let me write trash in which I can sometimes indulge in the idea that being a man is so much better than being nonexistent or ameboid that I call it a triumph. If the use of a fairly simple style to describe the complexity of other worlds and times is the sign of my pulp background, then so be it; I have no intention of developing the elaborated, tortuous, impressionistic or "experimental" style that may be necessary to perk up the threadbare nature of most mainstream ideas. (I'm not convinced it helps, even there.) And if trying to develop tight and explicit plots makes me a hack, then I'll get by with my royalties and leave the plaudits of the critics to those who find them necessary.

That doesn't mean my mind is completely closed. But it isn't wide open to the overtures of anyone outside the field—or to most of those within it, for that matter.

No I'll stick with what I know of the universe—which is a long ways from being wide open in all ways. There are quite a few rather rigid limits on that uni-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

verse, without which it wouldn't work. There is that pesky limitation on velocity which seems to make a faster-than-light drive impossible, and even a near-light drive incredibly demanding on energy sources. Maybe that will be bypassed some day; let's hope so. But there remain several conservation laws (mass-energy, momentum, angular momentum, and more) which set limits on us. And just maybe thermodynamics and other rules indicate the whole universe is running down—that it will be all closed eventually, despite Ms. LeGuin's faith. I intend to be a bit skeptical still as to the blandishments of new scientific or literary theories.

Science fiction has evolved pretty much by itself for nearly fifty years. During that time, it has grown and developed. Now, at a time when most literature is in decline—despite the nostrums of its bedside critics—science fiction is healthily capturing more and more readers. Perhaps there is something to be said for a field that can establish and maintain its own values.

During almost forty years, I've spent a lot of time outside the "ghetto" reading works of every description, including a fair amount of criticism. I've tried as best I can to improve my techniques of writing, in science fiction and far outside it. I've always been grateful for the help some criticism has given. But I'm suspicious enough to open my mind only when I find that the critic knows his field (mine, if it's science fiction he's criticizing) at least as well as I do and that he know something beyond the limits of his field. And I insist on my right to stick to the style and ideas I want to write and like to read.

Thus I refuse to take Gunn's final advice seriously. I've heard for decades that writers must broaden the appeal of science fiction. Experience teaches me that this is another of those clichés that is false. I don't really believe in the lowest common denominator appeal for science fiction. I've seen the results of broadening the appeal of television from the early, experimental and sometimes marvelous beginnings. I prefer to write for those with sufficient flexibility and intellect to be able to grasp science fiction as it is, and to appreciate it at its best and most demanding. Until the self-termed critics can do as much and can come up with more than clichés (half of them untrue), I'll remain an unregenerate writer and reader of science fiction.

Until then—

*STAY OUT OF MY GHETTO!* ★



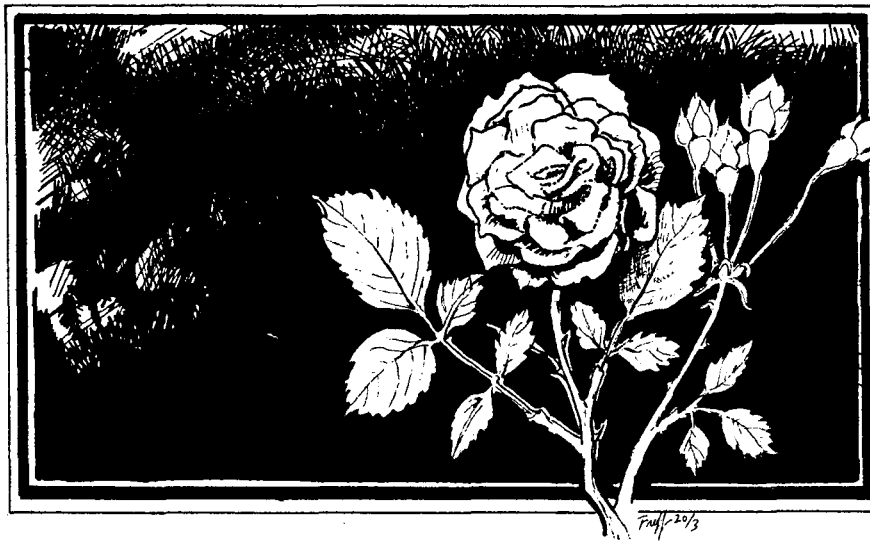
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# SIGN OF THE UNICORN

*ROGER ZELAZNY*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



## WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

WITHIN A WEEK of my return to Amber, Caine was dead. Murdered. I was the logical suspect, and I had already slain the real killer—a creature of a sort Random told me he had first met while attempting to rescue our missing brother, Brand, from the shadow where he was imprisoned. A party of such creatures had pursued Random through Shadow to the world where I had dwelled in less than blissful forgetfulness.

We deduced that the real author of all our ills was most likely a member of the family. It seemed possible, then, that Brand had become aware of this fact. Should he still be alive, the obvious course of action, as I saw it, was to attempt to rescue him. We could then simply ask him who was behind it all. Simple.

I attuned the Jewel of Judgment for my own use, both to obtain an extra weapon and for purposes of being seen sporting one of the traditional adornments of the monarch of Amber. Gérard accompanied me to the Grove of the Unicorn, where we recovered Caine's body and actually caught a glimpse of the unicorn itself. Also, *enroute*, Gérard had halted our journey long enough to beat the hell out of me, as a general cautionary notice, should I happen to be the traitor we were looking for. He also announced his intention of killing me later should this prove to be the case.

My plan was basically quite simple. Since no one of us had been able to reach Brand via his Trump, it had occurred to me that all of us working together at it might be able to get through to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him. Voila! We tried. We succeeded.

But one of us knifed Brand before he could tell us a thing. If nothing else, this confirmed the suspicion that it had to be one of us. Gérard took charge of the injured and expelled the rest of us from the room. We adjourned to other quarters and engaged in a fruitless session of guesswork, threats, promises and accusations. When we ran out of bad words we retired. Brand was still hanging on.

Fiona had told me that overexposure to the Jewel of Judgment resulted in severe and possibly fatal stress on the wearer, a condition initially characterized by a distortion of one's time sense. This phenomenon did seem to be developing as I made my way to my quarters. I did not have a chance to explore my symptoms further because *I* was knifed on entering my bedroom.

I came around lying on my old bed in my old house on the shadow Earth, the place where I had resided back when I had been Carl Corey. Crawling, I made it out of the house and into a snowstorm. As my time sense was still distorted, I buried the jewel in my old compost heap before heading down to the roadside.

I finally managed to flag down a car, driven by one of my former neighbors—my old friend Bill Roth. He took me to the same clinic where I had been taken years before, back when I had had my accident. The doctor who had been on duty in the emergency room that night was also present then and something about me, plus an unusually thorough medical records systems, brought it all back to him. Doubtful as to my rationality, he told me part of the story. Bill later filled in the rest.

During those dark times in my memory there had been two other medical facilities, not one. I had been committed to a sanitarium in Albany on a bum order certifying I needed it. There, I had apparently received some shock therapy. Whatever its effects, I escaped two days later and was heading back in the general direction of my home when the accident occurred. From the fake names used as next of kin and attending physician in connection with my committment, as well as from the police report's description of my rescuer, it became apparent that it had been Brand who had been trying to restore my memory and Brand who had probably saved my life by getting me out of my car and over to the shore, by administering what aid he could while waiting for help to arrive. It was only later that I wound up in Greenwood.

Now both of us lay punctured, and someone back in Amber must have been more than a little concerned that one or both of us might survive. As I lay contemplating these and other matters, Random contacted me via my Trump to tell me that Brand had regained consciousness and was asking for me.

It was time to go outpatient



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**once more, I knew. I had to get back immediately to find out which of my relatives was out to do the rest of us in—and maybe even why and how.**

**Such is the kingdom of Amber.**

* * * *

"CORWIN! What the Hell—"

"If blood be the price of admiralty, I've just bought me a naval commission," I said. "Give me something to wear."

He draped a long, heavy cloak about my shoulders and I fumbled to clasp it at my throat.

"All set," I said. "Take me to him."

He led me out the door, into the hall, toward the stair. I leaned on him heavily as we went.

"How bad is it?" he asked me.

"Knife," I said, and laid my hand on the spot. "Someone attacked me in my room last night."

"Who?"

"Well, it couldn't have been you, because I had just left you," I said, "and Gérard was up in the library with Brand. Subtract the three of you from the rest and start guessing. That is the best—"

"Julian," he said.

"His stock is definitely bearish," I said. "Fiona was just running him down for me last night, and of course it is no secret that he is not my favorite—"

"Corwin, he's gone. He cut out during the night. The servant who came to get me told me that Julian left an hour or so after the rest of us turned in. What does that look like to you?"

We reached the stair. I kept one hand on Random and the other on the banister. I called a halt at the first landing and rested there briefly.

"I don't know," I said. "It can sometimes be just as bad to extend the benefit of the doubt too far as not to grant it at all. But it does occur to me that if he thought he had disposed of me, he would look a lot better by staying here and acting surprised to learn of it than by getting the hell out. That *does* look suspicious. I am inclined to think he might have departed because he was afraid of what Brand would have to say when he came around."

"But you lived, Corwin. You got away from whoever attacked you, and he could not be certain he had done you in. If it were me, I would be worlds away by now."

"There is that," I acknowledged, and we started on down again. "Yes, you might well be right. Let us leave it academic for now. And no one is to know I have been injured."

He nodded.

"As you say. Silence beats a chamber pot in Amber."

"How's that?"

"'Tis gilt, m'lord, like a royal flush."

"Your wit pains both wounded and unwounded parts, Random. Spend some figuring how the assailant entered my room."

"Your panel?"

"It secures from the inside. I keep it that way now. And the door's lock is a new one. Tricky."

"All right, I have it. My answer requires that it be a family member, too."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tell me."

"Someone was willing to psych himself up and tough it through the Pattern again for a shot at you. He went below, walked it, projected himself into your room and attacked you."

"That would be perfect except for one thing. We all left at pretty much the same time. The attack did not occur later on in the evening. It happened immediately on my entering. There wasn't even sufficient time for one of us to get down to the chamber, let alone negotiate the Pattern. The attacker was already waiting. So if it was one of us, he had gotten in by some other means."

"Then he picked your lock, tricks and all."

"Possibly," I said, as we reached the landing and continued on. "We will rest at the corner so that I can go on into the library unassisted.

"Sure thing."

We did that. I composed myself, drew the cloak completely about me, squared my shoulders, advanced and knocked on the door.

"Just a minute"—Gérard's voice.

*Footsteps approaching the door. . .*

"Who is it?"

"Corwin," I said. "Random's with me."

I heard him call back, "You want Random, too?" and I heard a soft "No" in reply.

The door opened.

"Just you, Corwin," Gérard said.

I nodded, turned to Random.

"Later," I told him.

He returned my nod and headed back in the direction from which we had come. I entered the library.

"Open your cloak, Corwin," Gérard ordered.

"That is not necessary," Brand said, and I looked over and saw that he was propped up by a number of cushions and showing a yellow-toothed smile.

"Sorry, I am not as trusting as Brand," Gérard said, "and I will not have my work wasted. Let's have a look."

"I said that it is not necessary," Brand repeated. "He is not the one who stabbed me."

Gérard turned quickly.

"How do you know he isn't?" he asked.

"Because I know who did, of course. Don't be an ass, Gérard. I wouldn't have asked for him if I had reason to fear him."

"You were unconscious when I brought you through. You couldn't know who did it."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Well. . . Why didn't you tell me, then?"

"I have my reasons, and they are valid ones. I want to speak with Corwin alone now."

Gérard lowered his head.

"You had better not be delirious," he said. He stepped to the door, opened it again. "I'll be within hailing distance," he added, and closed it behind him.

I moved nearer. Brand reached up and I clasped his hand.

"Good to see that you made it back," he szid.

"Vice-versa," I said, and then I



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

took Gérard's chair, trying not to collapse into it.

"How do you feel now?" I asked.

"Rotten, in one sense. But better than I have in years, in another. It's all relative."

"Most things are."

"Not Amber."

I sighed.

"All right. I wasn't getting technical. What the hell happened?"

His gaze was most intense. He was studying me, looking for something. What? Knowledge, I'd guess. Or, more correctly, ignorance. Negatives being harder to gauge, his mind had to be moving fast, must have bene from the moment he had come around. Knowing him, he was more interested in what I did not know than in what I knew. He wasn't going to give away anything if he could help it. He wanted to know the minimum enlightenment he need shed in order to get what he wanted. Not a watt more would he willingly spend. For this was his way, and of course he wanted something. Unless. . .

More strongly in recent years than ever before I have tried to convince myself that people do change, that the passage of time does not serve merely to accentuate that which is already there, that qualitative changes do sometimes occur in people because of things they have done, seen, thought and felt. It would provide some small solace in times such as these when everything else seems to be going wrong, not to mention pepping up my mundane philosophy no end. And Brand had probably been responsible for saving my life and my memory, whatever his reasons. Very well. I resolved to give him the doubt's benefit without exposing my back. A small concession here, my move against the simple psychology of humors which generally governs the openings of our games.

"Things are never what they seem, Corwin," he began. "Your friend today is your enemy tomorrow, and—"

"Cut it out!" I said. "Cards on the table time is here. I do appreciate what Brandon Corey did for me, and it was my idea to try the trick we used to locate you and bring you back."

He nodded.

"I fancy there were good reasons for a recrudescence of fraternal sentiment after all this time."

"I might suppose you had additional reasons for helping me, also."

He smiled again, raised his right hand and lowered it.

"Then we are either even, or in one another's debt, depending upon how one looks at these things. As it would seem we now have need of one another, it would be well to regard ourselves in the most flattering light."

"You are stalling, Brand. You are trying to psych me. You are also spoiling my day's effort at idealism. You got me out of bed to tell me something. Be my guest."

"Same old Corwin," he said, chuckling. Then he looked away.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Or are you? I wonder. . . Did it change you, do you think? Living all that while in Shadow? Not knowing who you really were? Being a part of something else?"

"Maybe," I said. "I don't know. Yes, I guess it did. I know that it shortened my temper when it comes to family politics."

"Plain-speaking, blunt, plain-dealing? You miss some of the fun that way. But then there is a value to such novelty. Keep everyone unbalanced with it. . . Revert when they least expect it. . . Yes, it might prove valuable. Refreshing, too. All right! Panic not. Thus end my preliminaries. All pleasantries are now exchanged. I'll bare the basics, bridle the beast Unreason and wrest from murky mystery the pearl of sweetest sense. But one thing first, if you would. Have you anything smokable with you? It has been a number of years, and I'd like some foul weed or other—to celebrate my homecoming."

I started to say no. But I was sure there were some cigarettes in the desk, left there by me. I did not really want the exercise, but, "Just a minute" I said.

I tried to make my movements look casual rather than stiff as I rose and crossed the room. I attempted to make it seem as if I were resting my hand naturally upon the desktop as I rummaged through it, rather than leaning as heavily as I was. I masked my movements with my body and my cloak as much as possible.

I located the package and returned as I had come, stopping to light a pair at the hearth. Brand was slow in taking his from me.

"Your hand is rather shaky," he said. "What is the matter?"

"Too much partying last night," I said, returning to my chair.

"I hadn't thought of that. I imagine there would have been, wouldn't there? Of course. Everyone together in one room. . . Unexpected success in finding me, bringing me back. . . A desperate move on the part of a very nervous, very guilty person. . . Half-success there. Me injured and mum, but for how long? Then—"

"You said that you knew who did it. Were you kidding?"

"No, I was not."

"Who then?"

"In its place, dear brother. In its place. Sequence and order, time and stress—they are most important in this matter. Allow me to savor the drama of the event in safe retrospect. I see me punctured and all of you gathered round. Ah! what would I not give to witness that tableau! Could you possibly describe for me the expression on each face?"

"I'm afraid their faces were my least concern at the time."

He sighed and blew smoke.

"Ah, that is good," he said. "Never mind, I can see their faces. I've a vivid imagination, you know. Shock, distress, puzzlement—shading over into suspicion, fear. Then all of you departed, I'm told, and gentle Gérard my nursemaid here." He paused, stared into the smoke, and for a moment the note of mockery was absent. "He is the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only decent one among us, you know."

"He's high on my list," I said.

"He took good care of me. He's always looked out for the rest of us. . ." He chuckled suddenly. "Frankly, I can't see why he bothers. As I was musing, though—prompted by your recuperating self—you must have adjourned to talk things over. There is another party I'm sad I missed. All those emotions and suspicions and lies bouncing off one another—and no one wanting to be the first to say good night. It must have gotten shrill after a time. Everyone on his own best behavior, with an eye out to blacken the rest. Attempts to intimidate the one guilty person. Perhaps a few stones shied at scapegoats. But, all in all, nothing much really accomplished. Am I right?"

I nodded, appreciative of the way his mind worked and resigned to his telling it his way.

"You know you're right," I said.

He gave me a sharp look at that, then went on, "But everyone did finally go off, to lie awake worrying, or to get together with an accomplice, to scheme. There were hidden turmoils in the night. It is flattering to know that my well-being was on everyone's mind. Some, of course, were for it, others against. And in the midst of it all, I rallied—nay, flourished—not wishing to disappoint my supporters. Gérard spent a long while bringing me up to date on recent history. When I had enough of this, I sent for you."

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm here. What did you want to tell me?"

"Patience, brother! Patience! Consider all the years you spent in Shadow, not even remembering—this." He gestured widely with his cigarette. "Consider all that time you waited, unknowing, until I succeeded in locating you and tried to remedy your plight. Surely a few moments now are not so priceless by contrast."

"I was told that you had sought me," I said. "I wondered at that, for we had not exactly parted on the best of terms the last time we were together."

He nodded.

"I cannot deny it," he said. "But I always get over such things, eventually."

I snorted.

"I have been deciding how much to tell you, and what you would believe," he continued. "I doubted you would accept it if I had simply come out and said that, save for a few small items, my present motives are almost entirely altruistic."

I snorted again.

"—But this is true," he went on, "and to lay your suspicions, I add that it is because I have small choice in it. Beginnings are always difficult. Wherever I begin, something preceded it. You were gone for so long. If one must name a single thing, however, then let it be the throne. —There. I have said it. We had thought of a way to take it, you see. This was just after your disappearance, and in some ways, I



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suppose, prompted by it. Dad suspected Eric of having slain you. But there was no evidence. We worked on this feeling, though—a word here and there, every now and then. Years passed, with you unreachable by any means, and it seemed more and more likely that you were indeed dead. Dad looked upon Eric with growing disfavor. Then, one night, pursuant to a discussion I had begun on a totally neutral matter—most of us present at the table—he said that no fratricide would ever take the throne, and he was looking at Eric as he said it. You know how his eyes could get. Eric grew bright as a sunset and could not swallow for a long while. But then Dad took things much further than any of us had anticipated or desired. In fairness to you, I do not know whether he spoke solely to vent his feelings, or whether he actually meant what he said. But he told us that he had more than half-decided upon you as his successor, so that he took whatever misadventure had befallen you quite personally. He would not have spoken of it, but that he was now convinced as to your passing. In the months that followed, we reared you a cenotaph to give some solid form to this conclusion, and we made certain that no one forgot Dad's feelings toward Eric. All along, after yourself, Eric was the one we felt had to be gotten around to reach the throne—"

"We! Who were the others?"

"Patience, Corwin. Sequence and order, time and stress! Accent, emphasis. . . Listen." He took another cigarette, chain-lit it from the butt, stabbed the air with its burning tip. "The next step required that we get Dad out of Amber. This was the most crucial and dangerous part of it, and it was here that we disagreed. I did not like the idea of an alliance with a power I did not fully understand, especially one that gave them some hold on us. Using shadows is one thing; allowing them to use you is ill-considered, whatever the circumstances. I argued against it, but the majority had it otherwise." He smiled. "Two to one. Yes, there were three of us. We went ahead then. The trap was set and Dad went after the bait—"

"Is he still living?" I asked.

"I do not know," Brand said. "Things went wrong afterwards, and then I'd troubles of my own to concern me. After Dad's departure, though, our next move was to consolidate our position while waiting a respectable period of time for a presumption of death to seem warranted. Ideally, all that we required was the cooperation of one person. Either Caine or Julian—it did not matter which. You see, Bleys had already gone off into Shadow and was in the process of putting together a large military force—"

"Bleys! He was one of you?"

"Indeed. We intended him for the throne—with sufficient strings on him, of course, so that it would have amounted to a *de facto* triumvirate. So, he went off to assemble troops, as I was saying. We hoped for a bloodless takeover, but we had to be ready



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the event that words proved insufficient to win our case. If Julian gave us the land route in, or Caine the waves, we could have transported the troops with dispatch and held the day by force of arms, should that have proven necessary. Unfortunately, I chose the wrong man. In my estimate, Caine was Julian's superior in matters of corruption. So, with measured delicacy I sounded him on the matter. He seemed willing to go along with things, at first. But he either reconsidered subsequently or deceived me quite skillfully from the beginning. Naturally, I prefer to believe it was the former. Whatever, at some point he came to the conclusion that he stood to benefit more by supporting a rival claimant. To wit, Eric. Now Eric's hopes had been somewhat dashed by Dad's attitude toward him—but Dad was gone, and our intended move gave Eric the chance to act as defender of the throne. Unfortunately for us, such a position would also put him but a step away from the throne itself. To make matters darker, Julian went along with Caine in pledging the loyalty of his troops to Eric, as defender. Thus was the other trio formed. So Eric took a public oath to defend the throne, and the lines were thereby drawn. I was naturally in a somewhat embarassing position at this time. I bore the brunt of their animosity, as they did not know who my fellows were. Yet they could not imprison or torture me, for I would immediately be trumped out of their hands. And if they were to kill me, they realized there might well be a reprisal by parties unknown. So it had to stand as a stalemate for a time. They also saw that I could no longer move directly against them. They kept me under heavy surveillance. So a more devious route was charted. Again I disagreed and again I lost, two to one. We were to employ the same forces we had called upon to deal with Dad, this time for purposes of discrediting Eric. If the job of defending Amber, so confidently assumed, were to prove too much for him and Bleys then came onto the scene and handled the situation with dispatch, why Bleys would even have popular support as he moved on to assume the role of defender himself and—after a fit period of time—suffered the thrusting or sovereignty upon him, for the good of Amber."

"Question," I interrupted. "What about Benedict? I know he was off being discontent in his Avalon, but if something really threatened Amber—"

"Yes," he said, nodding, "and for that reason, a part of our deal was to involve Benedict with a number of problems of his own."

I thought of the harassment of Benedict's Avalon by the hellmaids. I thought of the stump of his right arm. I opened my mouth to speak again, but Brand raised his hand.

"Let me finish in my own fashion, Corwin. I am not unmindful of your thought processes as you speak. I feel the pain in your side, twin to my own. Yes, I



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know these things and many more." His eyes burned strangely as he took another cigarette into his hand and it lit of its own accord. He drew heavily upon it and spoke as he exhaled, "I broke with the others over this decision. I saw it as involving too great a peril, as placing Amber herself in jeopardy. Broke with them. . ." He watched the smoke for several moments before he continued, "But things were too far advanced that I might simply walk away. I had to oppose them, in order to defend myself as well as Amber. It was too late to swing over to Eric's side. He would not have protected me if he could have—and besides, I was certain he was going to lose. It was then that I decided to employ certain new abilities I had acquired.

"I had often wondered at the strange relationship between Eric and Flora, off on that shadow Earth she pretended so to enjoy. I had had a slight suspicion that there was something about that place which concerned him, and that she might be his agent there. While I could not get close enough to him to achieve any satisfaction on this count, I felt confident that it would not take too much in the way of investigation, direct and otherwise, to learn what Flora was about. And so I did. Then suddenly the pace accelerated. My own party was concerned as to my whereabouts. Then when I picked you up and shocked back a few memories, Eric learned from Flora that something was suddenly quite amiss. Consequently, both sides were soon looking for me. I had decided that your return would throw everyone's plans out the window and get me out of the pocket I was in long enough to come up with an alternative to the way things were going. Eric's claim would be clouded once again, you would have had supporters of your own, my party would have lost the pupose for its entire maneuver and I had assumed you would not be ungrateful to me for my part in things. Then you went and escaped from Porter, and things really got complicated. All of us were looking for you, as I later learned, for different reasons.

"But my former associates had something very extra going for them. They learned what was happening, located you and got there first. Obviously, there was a very simple way to preserve the status quo, where they would continue to hold the edge. Bleys fired the shots that put you and your car into the lake. I arrived just as this was occurring. He departed almost immediately, for it looked as if he had done a thorough job. I dragged you out though, and there was enough left to start treating. It was frustrating now that I think back on it, not knowing whether the treatment had really been effective, whether you would awaken as Corwin or Corey. It was frustrating afterwards, also, still not knowing. . . I hellrode out when help arrived. My associates caught up with me somewhat later and put me where you found me. Do you know the rest of the story?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not all of it."

"Then stop me whenever we've caught up on this. I only obtained it later, myself. Eric's crowd learned of the accident, got your location and had you transferred to a private place, where you could be better protected, and kept you heavily sedated, so that *they* could be protected."

"Why should Eric protect me, especially if my presence was going to wreck his plans?"

"By then, seven of us knew you were still living. That was too many. It was simply too late to do what he would probably have liked to do. He was still trying to live down Dad's words. If anything had happened to you once you were in his power, it would have blocked his movement to the throne. If Benedict ever got word of it, or Gérard. . . No, he'd not have made it. Afterwards, yes. Before, no. What happened was that general knowledge of the fact of your existence forced his hand. He scheduled his coronation and resolved to keep you out of the way until it had occurred. An extremely premature bit of business, not that I see he had much of a choice. I guess you know what happened after that, since it happened to you."

"I fell in with Bleys, just as he was making his move. Not too fortunate."

Brand shrugged.

"Oh, it might have been—if you had won, and if you had been able to do something about Bleys. You hadn't a chance though, not really. My grasp of their motivations begins to dissolve at this point, but I believe that that entire assault really constituted some sort of feint."

"Why?"

"As I said, I do not know. But they already had Eric just about where they wanted him. It should not have been necessary to call that attack."

I shook my head. Too much, too fast. . . Many of the facts sounded true, once I subtracted the narrator's bias. But still. . .

"I don't know. . ." I began.

"Of course," he said. "But if you ask me I will tell you."

"Who was the third member of your group?"

"The same person who stabbed me, of course. Would you care to venture a guess?"

"Just tell me."

"Fiona. The whole thing was her idea."

"Why didn't you tell me that right away?"

"Because you would not have sat still long enough to hear the rest of what I had to say. You would have dashed off to put her under restraint, discovered that she was gone, roused all the others, started an investigation and wasted a lot of valuable time. You still may, but it at least provided me with your attention for a sufficient time for me to convince you that I know what I am about. Now, when I tell you that time is essential and that you must hear the rest of what I have to say as soon as possible—if Amber is to have any chance at all—you might listen rather than chase a crazy lady."

I had already half-risen.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I shouldn't go after her?" I said.

"The hell with her, for now. You've got bigger problems. You had better sit down again.

So I did.

## X

A RAFT OF MOONBEAMS. . . The ghostly torchlight, like fires in black-and-white films. . . Stars. . . A few fine filaments of mist. . .

I leaned upon the rail, I looked across the world. . . Utter silence held the night, the dream-drenched city, the entire universe from here. . . Distant things—the sea, Amber, Arden, Garnath, the Lighthouse of Cabra, the Grove of the Unicorn, my tomb atop Kovir. . . Silent, far below, yet clear, distinct. . . A god's eye view, I'd say, or that of a soul cut loose and drifting high. . . In the middle of the night. . .

I had come to the place where the ghosts play at being ghosts, where the omens, portents, signs and animate desires thread the nightly avenues and palace high halls of Amber in the sky, Tir-na nog'th. . .

Turning, my back to the rail and dayworld's vestiges below, I regarded the avenues and dark terraces, the halls of the lords, the quarters of the low. . . The moonlight is intense in Tir-na Nog'th, silvers over the facing sides of all our imaged places. . . Stick in hand, I passed forward, and the strangelings moved about me, appeared at windows, on balconies, on benches, at gates. . . Unseen I passed, for truly put, in this place I was the ghost to whatever their substance. . .

. . . Silence and silver. . . Only the tapping of my stick, and that mostly muted. . . More mists adrift toward the heart of things. . . The palace a white bonfire of it. . . Dew, like drops of mercury on the finely sanded petals and stems in the gardens by the walks. . . The passing moon as painful to the eye as the sun at midday, the stars outshone, dimmed by it. . . Silver and silence. . . The shine. . .

I had not planned on coming, for its omens—if that they truly be—are deceitful, its similarities to the lives and places below unsettling, its spectacle often disconcerting. . . Still, I had come. . . A part of my bargain with time. . .

After I had left Brand to continue his recovery in the keeping of Gérard, I had realized that I required additional rest myself and sought to obtain it without betraying my disability. Fiona was indeed flown, and neither she nor Julian could be reached by means of the Trumps. Had I told Benedict and Gérard what Brand had told me, I was certain they would have insisted we begin efforts at tracking her down, at tracking both of them. I was equally certain that such efforts would prove useless.

I had sent for Random and Ganelon and retired to my quarters, giving out that I intended to pass the day in rest and quiet thought in anticipation of spending the night in Tir-na



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nog'th—reasonable behavior for any Amberite with a serious problem. I did not put much stock in the practice, but most of the others did. As it was the perfect time for me to be about such a thing, I felt that it would make my day's retirement believable. Of course, this obliged me to follow through on it that night. But this too, was good. It gave me a day, a night and part of the following day in which to heal sufficiently to carry my wound that much the better. I felt that it would be time well spent.

You've got to tell someone, though. I told Random and I told Ganelon. Propped in my bed, I told them of the plans of Brand, Fiona and Bleys, and of the Eric-Julian-Caine cabal. I told them what Brand had said concerning my return and his own imprisonment by his fellow conspirators. They saw why the survivors of both factions—Fiona and Julian—had run off: doubtless to marshall their forces, hopefully to expend them on one another, but probably not. Not immediately, anyhow. More likely, one or the other would move to take Amber first.

"They will just have to take numbers and wait their turns, like everyone else," Random had said.

"Not exactly," I remembered saying. "Fiona's allies and the things that have been coming in on the black road are the same guys."

"And the Circle in Lorraine?" Ganelon had asked.

"The same. That was how it manifested itself in that shadow. They came a great distance."

"Ubiquitous bastards," Random had said.

Nodding, I had tried to explain.

. . . .And so I came to Tir-na Nog'th. When the moon rose and the apparition of Amber came faintly into the heavens, stars showing through it, pale halo about its towers, tiny flecks of movement upon its walls, I waited, waited with Ganelon and Random, waited on the highest crop of Kovir, there where the three steps are fashioned, roughly, out of the stone. . .

. . . .When the moonlight touched them, the outline of the entire stairway began to take shape, spanning the great gulf to that point above the sea the vision city held. When the moonlight fell full upon it, the stair had taken as much of substance as it would ever possess, and I set my foot on the stone. . . Random held a full deck of Trumps and I'd mine within my jacket. Grayswandir, forged upon this very stone by moonlight, held power in the city in the sky, and so I bore my blade along. . . I had rested all day, and I held a staff to lean upon. . . Illusion of distance and time. . . The stairs through the Corwin-ignoring sky escalate somehow, for it is not a simple arithmetic progression up them once motion has commenced. . . I was here, I was there, I was a quarter of the way up, before my shoulder had forgotten the clasp of Ganelon's hand. . . If I looked too hard at any portion of the stair, it lost its shimmering opacity and I saw the ocean far below as through a translucent lens. . . I



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lost track of time, though it seems it's never long, afterwards. . . As far beneath the waves as I'd soon be above them, off to my right, glittering and curling, the outline of Rebma appeared within the sea. . . I thought of Moire, wondered how she fared. . . What would become of our deepwater double should Amber ever fall? Would the image remain unshattered in its mirror? Or would building blocks and bones be taken and shaken alike, dice in the deepwater casino canyons our fleets fly over? No answer in the mandrowning Corwin-confounding waters, though I felt a twinge in my side. . .

. . . .At the head of the stair, I entered, coming into the ghost city as one would enter Amber after mounting the great forestair up Kolvir's seaward face.

. . . .I leaned upon the rail, looked across the world.

The black road led off to the south. I could not see it by night. Not that it mattered. I knew now where it led. Or rather where Brand said that it led. As he appeared to have used up a life's worth's reasons for lying, I believed that I knew where it led.

. . . .All the way.

. . . .From the brightness of Amber and the power and clean-shining splendor of adjacent Shadow, off through the progressively darkening slices of image that lead away in any direction, farther, through the twisted landscapes, and farther still, on through places seen only when drunk, delirious or dreaming illy, and farther yet again, running beyond the place where I stop. . . Where *I* stop. . .

How to put simply that which is not a simple thing. . . ? Solipsism, I suppose, is where we have to begin—the notion that nothing exists but the self or, at least, that we cannot truly be aware of anything but our own existence and experience. I can find, somewhere, off in Shadow, anything I can visualize. Any of us can. This, in good faith, does not transcend the limits of the ego. It may be argued, and in fact has, by most of us, that we create the shadows we visit out of the stuff of our own psyches, that we alone truly exist, that the shadows we traverse are but projections of our own desires. . . Whatever the merits of this argument, and there are several, it does go far toward explaining much of the family's attitude toward people, places and things outside of Amber. Namely, we are toymakers and they, our playthings—sometimes dangerously animated, to be sure; but this, too, is part of the game. We are impresarios by temperament, and we treat one another accordingly. While solipsism does tend to leave one slightly embarassed on questions of etiology, one can easily avoid the embarassment by refusing to admit the validity of the questions. Most of us are, as I have often observed, almost entirely pragmatic in the conduct of our affairs. Almost. . .

. . . .Yet, yet there is a disturbing element in the picture. There is a place where the shadows go mad. . . When you purposely push yourself through layer after



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

layer of Shadow, surrendering—again, purposely—a piece of your understanding every step of the way, you come at last to a mad place beyond which you cannot go. Why do this? In hope of an insight, I'd say, or a new game. . . But when you come to this place, as we all have, you realize that you have reached the limit of Shadow or the end of yourself—synonymous terms, as we had always thought. Now, though. . .

Now I know that it is not so, now as I stand, waiting, without the Courts of Chaos, telling you what it was like, I know that it is not so. But I knew well enough then, that night, in Tir-na Nog'th, had known earlier, when I had fought the goat-man in the black circle of Torraine, had known that day in the Lighthouse of Cabra, after my escape from the dungeons of Amber, when I had looked upon ruined Garnath. . . I knew that that was not all there was to it. I knew because I knew that the black road ran beyond that point. It passed through madness into chaos and kept going. The things that traveled across it came from somewhere, but they were not my things. I had, somehow, helped to grant them this passage, but they did not spring from my version of reality. They were their own, or someone else's—small matter there—and they tore holes in that small metaphysic we had woven over the ages. They had entered our preserve, they were not of it, they threatened it, they threatened us. Fiona and Brand had reached beyond everything and found something, where none of the rest of us had believed anything to exist. The danger released was, on some level, almost worth the evidence obtained: we were not alone, nor were shadows truly our toys. Whatever our relationship with Shadow, I could never more regard it in the old light. . .

. . . .All because the black road headed south and ran beyond the end of the world, where I stop.

Silence and silver. . . Walking away from the rail, leaning on my stick, passing through the fog-spun, mist-woven, moonlight-brushed fabric of vision within the troubling city. . . Ghosts. . . Shadows of shadows. . . Images of probability. . . Might-bes and might-have-beens. . . Probability lost. . . Probability regained. . .

Walking, across the promenade now. . . Figures, faces, many of them familiar. . . What are they about? Hard to say. . . Some lips move, some faces show animation. . . There are no words there for me. . . I pass among them, unnoted. . .

There. . . One such figure. . . Alone, but waiting. . . Fingers unknotting minutes, casting them away. . . Face averted, and I wish to see it. . . A sign that I will or should. . . She sits on a stone bench beneath a gnarly tree. . . She gazes in the direction of the palace. . . Her form is quite familiar. . . Approaching, I see that it is Lorraine. . . She continues to regard a point far beyond me, does not hear me say that I have avenged her death. . .

But mine is the power to be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard here. . . It hangs in the sheathe at my side. . .

. . . .Drawing Grayswandir, I raise my blade overhead where moonlight tricks its patterns into a kind of motion. I place it on the ground between us. . .

"Corwin!"

Her head snaps back, her hair rusts in the moonlight, her eyes focus. . .

"Where did you come from? You're early. . ."

"You wait for me?"

"Of course. You told me to—"

"How did you come to this place?"

"This bench. . . ?"

"No. This city."

"Amber? I do not understand. . . You brought me yourself. . . I—"

"Are you happy here?"

"You know that I am, so long as I am with you."

I had not forgotten the evenness of her teeth, the hint of freckles beneath the soft light's veil. . . .

"What happened? It is very important. Pretend for a moment that I do not know, and tell me everything that happened to us after the battle of the black circle in Lorraine."

She frowned. She stood. She turned away.

"We had that argument," she said. "You followed me, drove away Melkin and we talked. I saw that I was wrong and I went with you to Avalon. There, your brother Benedict persuaded you to talk with Eric. You were not reconciled, but you agreed to a truce because of something that he told you. He swore not to harm you and you swore to defend Amber, with Benedict to witness both oaths. We remained in Avalon while you obtained chemicals, and we went to another place later, a place where you purchased strange weapons. We won the battle, but Eric lies wounded now." She stood and faced me. "Are you thinking of ending the truce? Is that it?"

I shook my head, and though I knew better I reached to embrace her. I wanted to hold her, despite the fact that one of us did not exist, could not exist, when that tiny gap of space between our skins was crossed, to tell her that whatever had happened or would happen—

The shock was not severe, but it caused me to stumble. . . I lay across Grayswandir. . . My staff had fallen to the grass several paces away. . . Rising to my knees, I saw that the color had gone out of her face her eyes her hair. . . Her mouth shaped ghost words as her head turned, searching. . . Sheathing Grayswandir, recovering my staff, I rose once again. . . Her seeing passed through me and focussed. . . Her face grew smooth, she smiled, started forward. . . I moved aside and turned, watching her run toward the man who approached, seeing her clasped in his arms, glimpsing his face as he bent it toward her own, lucky ghost, silver rose at the throat of his garment, kissing her, this man I would never know, silver on silence, and silver. . .



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Walking away. . . Not looking back. . . Crossing the promenade. . .

The voice of Random: "Corwin, are you all right?"

"Yes."

"Anything interesting happening?"

"Later, Random."

"Sorry."

. . . .And sudden, the gleaming stair before the palace grounds. Up it, and a turn to the right. . . Slow and easy now, into the garden. . . Ghost flowers throb on their stalks all about me, ghost shrubs spill blossoms like frozen firework displays. . . *Sans* colors, all. . . Only the essentials sketched in, degrees of luminosity in silver the terms of their claim on the eye. . . Only the essentials here. . . Is Tir-na Nog'th a special sphere of Shadow in the real world, swayed by the promptings of the id—a full-sized projective test in the sky, perhaps even a therapeutic device. . . ? Despite the silver, I'd say, if this is a piece of the soul, the night is very dark. . . And silent. . .

Walking. . . By fountains, benches, groves, cunning alcoves in mazes of hedging. . . Passing along the walks, up an occasional step, across small bridges. . . Moving past ponds, among trees, by an odd piece of statuary, a boulder, a sundial (moondial, here?), bearing to my right, pressing steadily ahead, rounding, after a time, the northern end of the palace, swinging left then, courtyard overhung by balconies, ghosts here and there upon them, behind them, within. . .

Circling around to the rear, just to see the back gardens this way, again, for they are lovely by normal moonlight in the true Amber. . .

A few more figures, talking, standing. . . No motion but my own is apparent. . .

. . . .And feel my self drawn to the right. As one should never turn down a free oracle, I go. . .

. . . .Toward a mass of high hedging, a small open area within, if it is not overgrown. . . Long ago there was. . .

Two figures, embracing, within. . . They part as I begin to turn away. . . None of my affair, but. . . Deirdre. . . One of them is Deirdre. . . I know who the man will be before he turns. . . It is a cruel joke by whatever powers rule that silver, that silence. . . Back, back, away from that hedge. . . Turning, stumbling, rising again, going, away, now, quickly. . .

The voice of Random: "Corwin? Are you all right?"

"Later! Damn it! Later!"

"It is not too long till sunrise, Corwin. I felt I had better remind you—"

"Consider me reminded!"

. . . .Away, now, quickly. . . Time, too, is a dream in Tir-na Nog'th. . . Small comfort, but better than none. . . Quickly, now, away, going, again. . .

. . . .Toward the palace, bright architecture of the mind or spirit, more clearly standing now than the real ever did. . . To judge perfection is to render a worthless verdict, but I must see what lies within. . . This must be an end of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sorts, for I am driven. . . I had not paused to recover my staff from where it had fallen this time, among the sparkling grasses. . . I know where I must go, what I must do. . . Obvious now, though the logic which has seized me is not that of the waking mind. . .

Hurrying, climbing, up to the rearward portal. . . The sidebiting soreness comes home again. . . Across the threshold, in. . .

. . . .Into an absence of starshine and moonlight. The illumination is without direction, seeming almost to drift and to pool, aimlessly. . . Wherever it misses, the shadows are absolute, occulting large sections of room, hallway, closet and stair. . .

Among them, through them, almost running now. . . Monochrome of my home. . . Apprehension overtakes me. . . The black spots seem like holes in this piece of reality now. . . I fear to pass too near. . . Fall in and be lost. . .

Turning. . . Crossing. . . Finally. . . Entering. . . The throne room. . . Bushels of blackness stacked where my eyes would drive down lines of seeing to the throne itself. . .

There, though, is movement. . .

A drifting, to my right, as I advance. . .

A lifting, with the drifting. . .

The boots on feet on legs come into view as forward pressing I near the place's base. . .

Grayswandir comes into my hand, finding its way into a patch of light, renewing its eyetricking, shapeshifting stretch, acquiring a glow of its own. . .

I place my left foot on the step, rest my left hand on my knee. . . Distracting but bearable, the throb of my healing gut. . . I wait for the blackness, the emptiness to be drawn, appropriate curtain for the theatrics with which I am burdened this night. . .

. . . .And it slides aside, revealing a hand, an arm, a shoulder, the arm a glinting, metallic thing, its planes like the facets of a gem, its wrist and elbow wondrous weaves of silver cable, pinned with flecks of fire, the hand, stylized, skeletal, a Swiss toy, a mechanical insect, functional, deadly, beautiful in its way. . .

. . . .And it slides aside, revealing the rest of the man. . .

. . . .Benedict stands relaxed beside the throne, his left and human hand laid lightly upon it. . . He leans toward the throne. . . His lips are moving. . .

. . . .And it slides aside, revealing the throne's occupant. . .

"Dara!"

. . . .Turned toward her right, she smiles, she nods to Benedict, her lips move. . . I advance and extend Grayswandir till its point rests lightly in the concavity beneath her sternum. . .

Slowly, quite slowly, she turns her head and meets my eyes. . . She takes on color and life. . . Her lips move again, and this time her words reach me. . .

"What are you?"

"No. That is my question. You answer it. Now."

"I am Dara. Dara of Amber, Queen Dara. I hold this throne



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by right of blood and conquest. Who are you?"

"Corwin. Also of Amber. Don't move! I did not ask *who* you are—"

"Corwin is dead these many centuries. I have seen his tomb."

"Empty."

"Not so. His body lies within."

"Give me your lineage!"

Her eyes move to her right, where the shade of Benedict still stands. . . A blade has appeared in his new hand, seeming almost an extension of it, but that he holds it loosely, casually. . . His left hand now rests on her arm. . . His eyes seek me back of Grayswandir's hilt. . . Failing, they go again to that which is visible—Grayswandir—recognizing its design. . .

"I am the great-granddaughter of Benedict and the hellmaid Lintra, whom he loved and later slew." Benedict winces at this, but she continues, "I never knew her. My mother and my mother's mother were born in a place where time does not run as in Amber. I am the first of my mother's line to bear all the marks of humanity. And you, Lord Corwin, are but a ghost from a long dead past, albeit a dangerous shade. How you came here, I do not know. But it was wrong of you. Return to your grave. Trouble not the living."

My hand wavers. . . Grayswandir strays no more than half an inch. . . Yet that is sufficient. . .

Benedict's thrust is below my threshold of perception. . . His new arm drives the new hand that holds that blade that strikes Grayswandir, as his old arm draws his old hand, which has seized upon Dara, back across the arm of the throne. . . This subliminal impression reaches me moments later, as I fall back, cutting air, recover and strike an *en garde*, reflexively. . . It is ridiculous for a pair of ghosts to fight. . . Here, it is uneven. . . He cannot even reach me, whereas Grayswandir—

But no! His blade changes hands as he releases Dara and pivots, bringing them together, old hand and new. His left wrist rotates as he slides it forward and down, moving into what would be *corps à corps*, were we two facing mortal bodies. For a moment, our guards are locked. That moment is enough. . .

That gleaming, mechanical hand comes forward, a thing of moonlight and fire, blackness and smoothness, all angles, no curves, fingers slightly flexed, palm silver-scribbled with a half-familiar design, comes forward, comes forward and catches at my throat. . .

. . . .Missing, the fingers catch my shoulder and the thumb goes hooking—whether for clavicle or larynx, I do not know. I throw one punch with my left, toward his midsection, and there is nothing there. . .

The voice of Random: "Corwin! The sun is about to rise! You've got to come down now!"

I cannot even answer. . . A second or two and that hand would tear away whatever it held. . . That hand. . . Grayswandir and that hand, which strangely resembles it, are the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only two things which seem to coexist in my world and the city of ghosts. . .

"I see it, Corwin! Pull away and reach for me! The Trump—"

I spin Grayswandir out of the bind and bring it around and down in a long slashing arc. . .

. . . .Only a ghost could have beaten Benedict or Benedict's ghost with that maneuver. We stand too close for him to block my blade, but his countercut, perfectly placed, would have removed my arm, had there been an arm there to meet it. . .

As there is not, I complete the stroke, delivering the blow with the full force of my right arm, high upon that lethal device of moonlight and fire, blackness and smoothness, near to the point where it is joined with him. . .

With an evil tearing at my shoulder, the arm comes away from Benedict, and grows still. . . We both fall. . .

"Get up! By the unicorn, Corwin, get up! The sun is rising! The city will come apart about you!"

. . . .The floor beneath me wavers to and from a misty transparency. I glimpse a light-scaled expanse of water. . . I roll to my feet, barely avoiding the ghost's rush to clutch at the arm he has lost. . . It clings like a dead parasite and my side is hurting again. . .

. . . .Suddenly I am heavy and the vision of ocean does not fade. I begin to sink through the floor. . . Color returns to the world, wavering stripes of pink. . . The Corwin-spurning floor parts and the Corwin-killing gulf is opened. . .

I fall. . .

"This way, Crowin! Now!"

. . . .Random stands on a mountaintop and reaches for me. I extend my hand. . .

CYBERNETICS, LOGIC, ROBOTICS,
AUTOMATA, COMPUTERS,
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
THE LOGIC PRESS©
CATALOG $1.00
260 GODWIN AVE.
WYCKOFF, N.J. 07481

## XI

. . . .And frying pans without fires are often far between. . .

We untangled ourselves and rose. I sat down again immediately, on the bottommost stair. I worked the metal hand loose from my shoulder—no blood there, but a promise of bruises to come—then cast it and its arm to the ground. The light of early morning did not detract from its exquisite and menacing appearance.

Ganelon and Random stood beside me.

"You all right, Corwin?"

"Yeah. Just let me catch my breath."

"I brought food," Random said. "We could have breakfast right here."

"Good idea."

As Random began unpacking



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

provisions, Ganelon nudged the arm with the toe of his boot.

"What the hell," he asked, "is that?"

I shook my head.

"I lopped it off the ghost of Benedict," I told him. "For reasons I do not understand, it was able to reach me."

He stooped and picked it up, studied it.

"A lot lighter than I thought it would be," he observed. He raked the air with it. "You could do quite a job on someone, with a hand like that."

"I know."

He worked the fingers.

"Maybe the real Benedict could use it."

"Maybe," I said. "My feelings are quite mixed when it comes to offering it to him, but possibly you're right. . ."

"How's the side?"

I rpodded it gently.

"Not especially bad, everything considered. I'll be able to ride after breakfast, so long as we take it nice and easy."

"Good. —Say, Corwin, while Random is getting things ready, I have a question that may be way out of order, but it has been bothering me all along. . ."

"Ask it."

"Well, let me put it this way. . . I am all for you, or I would not be here. I will fight for you to have your throne, no matter what. But every time talk of the succession occurs, someone gets angry and breaks it off or the subject gets changed. Like Random did, while you were up there. I suppose that it is not absolutely essential for me to know the basis of your claim to the throne, or that of any of the others, but I cannot help being curious as to the reasons for all the friction."

I sighed, then sat silent for a time.

"All right," I said, after awhile, and then I chuckled. "All right. If we cannot agree on these things ourselves, I would guess that they must seem pretty confused to an outsider. Benedict is the eldest. His mother was Cymnea. She bore Dad two other sons, also—Osric and Finndo. Then—how does one put these things? —Faiella bore Eric. After that, Dad found some defect in his marriage with Cymnea and had it dissolved—*ab initio*, as they would say in my old shadow—from the beginning. Neat trick, that. But he was the king."

"Didn't that make all of them illegitimate?"

"Well, it left their status less certain. Osric and Finndo were more than a little irritated, as I understand it, but they died shortly thereafter. Benedict was either less irritated or more politic about the entire affair. He never raised a fuss. Dad then married Faiella."

"And that made Eric legitimate?"

"It would have, if he had acknowledged Eric as his son. He treated him as if he were, but he never did anything formal in that regard. It involved the smoothing over process with Cymnea's family, which had become a bit



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stronger around that time."

"Still, if he treated him as his own. . ."

"Ah! But he later *did* acknowledge Llewella formally. She was born out of wedlock, but he decided to recognize her, poor girl. All of Eric's supporters hated her for its effect on his status. Anywa, Faiella was later to become my mother. I was born safely in wedlock, making me the first with a clean claim on the throne. Talk to one of the others and you may get a different line of reasoning, but those are the facts it will have to be based on. Somehow, it does not seem quite as important as it once did, though, with Eric dead and Benedict not really interested. . . But that is where I stand."

"I see—sort of," he said. "Just one more thing, then. . ."

"What?"

"Who is next? —if anything were to happen to you. . . ?"

I shook my head.

"It gets even more complicated there, now. Caine would have been next. With him dead, I see it as swinging over to Clarissa's brood—the redheads. Bleys would have followed, then Brand."

"Clarissa? What became of your mother?"

"She died in childbirth. Deirdre was the child. Dad did not remarry for many years after mother's death. When he did, it was a redheaded wench from a far southern shadow. I never liked her. He began feeling the same way after a time and started fooling around again. They had one reconciliation after Llewella's birth in Rebma, and Brand was the result. When they were finally divorced, he recognized Llewella to spite Clarissa. At least, that is what I think happened."

"So you are not counting the ladies in the succession?"

"No. They are neither interested nor fit. If I were though, Fiona would precede Bleys and Llewella would follow him. —After Clarissa's crowd, it would swing over to Julian, Gérard and Random, in that order. Excuse me— Count Flora before Julian. The marriage data is even more involved, but no one will dispute the final order. Let it go at that."

"Gladly," he said. "So now Brand gets it if you die, right?"

"Well. . . He is a self-confessed traitor and he rubs everybody the wrong way. I do not believe the rest of them would have him, as he stands now."

"But the alternative is Julian."

I shrugged.

"The fact that I do not like Julian does not make him unfit. In fact, he might even be a very effective monarch."

"So he knifed you for the chance to prove it," Random called out. "Come on and eat."

"I still don't think so," I said, getting to my feet and heading for the food. "First, I don't see how he would have gotten to me. Second, it would have been too damned obvious. Third, if I die in the near future Benedict will have the real say as to the succession. Everyone knows that. He's got the seniority, he's got the wits



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he's got the power. He could simply say, for example, 'The hell with all this bickering, I am backing Gérard,' and that would be it."

"What if he decided to reinterpret his own status and take it himself?" Ganelon asked.

We seated ourselves on the ground and took the tin dishes Random had filled.

"He could have had it long before this, had he wanted it," I said. "There are several ways of regarding the offspring of a void marriage, and the most favorable one would be the most likely in his case. Osric and Finndo rushed to judgment, taking the worst view. Benedict knew better. He just waited. So. . . It is possible. Unlikely, though, I'd say."

"Then—in the normal course of affairs—if anything happened to you, it could still be very much up in the air?"

"Very much."

"But why was Caine killed?" Random asked. Then, between mouthfuls, he answered his own question, "So that when they got you, it would swing over to Clarissa's kids immediately. It has occurred to me that Bleys is probably still living, and he is next in line. His body was never found. My guess is this: He trumped off to Fiona during your attack and returned to Shadow to rebuild his forces, leaving you to what he hoped would be your death at the hands of Eric. He is finally ready to move again. So they killed Caine and tried for you. If they are really allied with the black-road horde, they could have arranged for another assault from that quarter. Then he could have done the same thing you did—arrive at the last hour, turn back the invaders and move on in. And there he would be, next in line and first in force. Simple. Except that you survived and Brand has been returned. If we are to believe Brand's accusation of Fiona—and I see no reason why we should not—then it follows from their original program."

I nodded.

"Possibly," I said. "I asked Brand just those things. He admitted their possibility, but he disavowed any knowledge as to whether Bleys was still living. Personally, I think he was lying."

"Why?"

"It is possible that he wishes to combine revenge for his imprisonment and the attempt on his life with the removal of the one impediment, save for myself, to his own succession. I think he feels that I will be expended in a scheme he is evolving to deal with the black road. The destruction of his own cabal and the removal of the road could make him look pretty decent, especially after all the pennance he has had thrust upon him. Then, maybe then, he would have a chance—or thinks that he would."

"Then you think Bleys is still living, too?"

"Just a feeling," I said. "But yes, I do."

"What is their strength, anyway?"

"An endorsement of higher education," I said. "Fiona and Brand paid attention to Dworkin



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

while the rest of us were off indulging our assorted passions in Shadow. Consequently, they seem to have obtained a better grasp of principles than we possess. They know more about Shadow and what lies beyond it, more about the Pattern, more about the Trumps than we do. That is why Brand was able to send you his message."

"An interesting thought. . ." Random mused. "Do you think they might have disposed of Dworkin after they felt they had learned enough from him? It would certainly help to keep things exclusive, if anything happened to Dad."

"That thought had not occurred to me," I said.

And I wondered, could they have done something that had affected his mind? Something that left him as he was when last I had seen him? If so, were they aware that he was possibly still living, somewhere? Or might they have assumed his total destruction?

"Yes, an interesting thought," I said. "I suppose that it is possible."

The sun inched its way upward, and the food restored me. No trace of Tir-na Nog'th remained in the morning's light. My memories of it had already taken on the quality of images in a dim mirror. Ganelon fetched its only other token, the arm, and Random packed it away along with the dishes. By daylight, the first three steps looked less like stairs and more like jumbled rock.

Random gestured with his head.

"Take the same way back?"

"Yes," I said, and we mounted.

We had come by way of a trail that wound about Kolvir to the south. It was longer but less rugged than the route across the crest. I'd a humor to pamper myself so long as my side protested.

So we bore to the right, moving single file, Random in the lead, Ganelon to the rear. The trail ran gently upward, then cut back down again. The air was cool, and it bore the aromas of verdure and moist earth, a thing quite unusual in that stark place, at that altitude. Straying air currents, I reasoned, from the forest far below.

We let the horses pick their own casual pace down through the dip and up the next rise. As we neared its crest, Random's horse whinnied and began to rear. He controlled it immediately, and I glanced about but saw nothing that might have startled it.

When he reached its summit, Random slowed and called back, "Take a look at that sunrise now, will you?"

It would have been rather difficult to avoid doing so, though I did not remark on the fact. Random was seldom given to sentimentality over vegetation, geology or illumination.

I almost drew rein myself as I topped the rise, for the sun was a fantastic golden ball. It seemed half again its normal size, and its peculiar coloration was unlike anything I remembered having seen before. It did marvellous things to the band of ocean that had come into view above the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next rise, and the tints of cloud and sky were indeed singular. I did not halt, though, for the sudden brightness was almost painful.

"You're right," I called out, following him down into the next declivity. Behind me, Ganelon snorted an appreciative oath.

When I had blinked away the aftereffects of that display I noticed that the vegetation was heavier than I had remembered in this little pocket in the sky. I had thought there were several scrubby trees and some patches of lichen, but there were actually several dozen trees, larger than I recalled, and greener, with a clutch of grasses here and there and a vine or two softening the outlines of the rocks. However, since my return I had only passed this way after dark. And now that I thought of it, it was probably the source of the aromas that had come to me earlier.

Passing through, it seemed that the little hollow was also wider than I recalled it to be. By the time we had crossed and were ascending once more, I was certain of it.

"Random," I called out, "has this placed changed recently?"

"Hard to say," he answered. "Eric didn't let me out much. It seems to have grown up a bit."

"It seems bigger—wider."

"Yes, it does. I had thought that that was just my imagination."

When we reached the next crest I was not dazzled again because the sun was blocked by foliage. The area ahead of us contained many more trees than the one we had just departed—and they were larger and closer together. We drew rein.

"I don't remember this," he said. "Even passing through at night, it would have registered. We must have taken a wrong turn."

"I don't see how. Still, we know about where we are. I would rather go ahead than go back and start again. We should keep aware of conditions around Amber, anyway."

"True."

He headed down toward the wood. We followed.

"It's kind of unusual, at this altitude—a growth like this," he called back.

"There also seems to be a lot more soil than I recall."

"I believe you are right."

The trail curved to the left as we entered among the trees. I could see no reason for this deviation from the direct route. We stayed with it, however, and it added to the illusion of distance. After a few moments, it swung suddenly to the right again. The prospect on cutting back was peculiar. The trees seemed even taller and were now so dense as to puzzle the eye that sought their penetration. When it turned once more it broadened, and the way was straight for a great distance ahead. Too great, in fact. Our little dell just wasn't that wide.

Random halted again.

"Damn it, Corwin! This is ridiculous!" he said. "You are not playing games, are you?"

"I couldn't if I would," I said.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have never been able to manipulate Shadow anywhere on Kolvir. There isn't supposed to be any to work with here."

"That has always been my understanding, too. Amber casts Shadow but is not of it. I don't like this at all. What do you say we turn back?"

"I've a feeling we might not be able to retrace our way," I said. "There has to be a reason for this, and I want to know it."

"It occurs to me that it might be some sort of a trap."

"Even so," I said.

He nodded and we rode on, down that shaded way, under trees grown now more stately. The wood was silent about us. The ground remained level, the trail straight. Half-consciously, we pushed the horses to a greater pace.

About five minutes passed before we spoke again. Then Random said, "Corwin, this can't be Shadow."

"Why not?"

"I have been trying to influence it and nothing happens. Have you tried?"

"No."

"Why don't you?"

"All right."

*A rock could jut beyond the coming tree, a Morning Glory twine and bell within that shrubby stand. . . There ought a patch of sky come clear, a wispy cloud upon it. . . Then let there be a fallen limb, a stair of fungus up its side. . . A scummed over puddle. . . A frog. . . Falling feather, drifting seed. . . A limb that twists just so. . . .Another trail upon our way, fresh-cut, deep-marked, past the place the feather should have fallen. . .*

"No good," I said.

"If it is not Shadow, what is it?"

"Something else, of course."

He shook his head and checked again to see that his blade was loose in its scabbard. Automatically, I did the same. Moments later, I heard Ganelon's make a small clicking noise behind me.

Ahead, the trail began to narrow, and shortly thereafter it commenced to wander. We were forced to slow our pace once again, and the trees pressed nearer with branches sweeping lower than at any time before. The trail became a path. It jogged, it curved, it gave a final twist and then quit.

Random ducked a limb, then raised his hand and halted. We came up beside him. For as far as I could see ahead there was no sign of the trail's picking up again. Looking back, I failed to locate any sign of it either.

"Suggestions," he said, "are now in order. We do not know where we have been or where we are going, let alone where we are. My suggestion is the hell with curiosity. Let's get out of here the fastest way we know how."

"The Trumps?" Ganelon asked.

"Yes. What do you say, Corwin?"

"Okay. I don't like it either, and I can't think of anything better to try. Go ahead."

"Who should I try for?" he asked, producing his deck and uncasing it. "Gérard?"

"Yes."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He shuffled through his cards, located Gérard's, stared at it. We stared at him. Time went its way.

"I can't seem to reach him," he finally announced.

"Try Benedict."

"Okay."

Repeat performance. No contact.

"Try Deirdre," I said, drawing forth my own deck and searching out her Trump. "I'll join you. We will see whether it makes a difference with two of us trying."

And again. And again.

"Nothing," I said, after a long effort.

Random shook his head.

"Did you notice anything unusual about your Trumps?" he asked.

"Yes, but I don't know what it is. They do seem different."

"Mine seem to have lost that quality of coldness they once possessed," he said.

I shuffled mine slowly. I ran my fingertips across them.

"Yes, you are right," I said. "That's it. But let us try again. Say, Flora."

"Okay."

The results were the same. And with Llewella. And Brand.

"Any idea what could be wrong?" Random asked.

"Not the slightest. They couldn't all be blocking us. They couldn't all be dead. —Oh, I suppose they could. But it is highly unlikely. Something seems to have affected the Trumps themselves, is what it is. And I never knew of anything could do that."

"Well, they are not guaranteed one hundred percent," Random said, "according to the manufacturer."

"What do you know?"

He chuckled.

"You never forget the day you come of age and walk the Pattern," he said. "I remember it as though it were just last year. When I had succeeded—all flushed with excitement, with glory—Dworkin presented me my first set of Trumps and instructed me in their use. I distinctly recall asking him whether they worked everywhere. And I remember his answer: 'No,' he'd said. 'But they should serve in any place you will ever be.' He never much liked me, you know."

"But did you ask him what he had meant by that?"

"Yes, and he said, 'I doubt that you will ever achieve a state where they will fail to serve you. Why don't you run along now?' And I did. I was anxious to go play with the Trumps all by myself."

" 'Achieve a state'? He didn't say 'reach a place'?"

"No. I have a very good memory for certain things."

"Peculiar—though not much help that I can see. Smacks of the metaphysical."

"I'd wager Brand would know."

"I've a feeling you're right, for all the good that does us."

"We ought to do something other than discuss metaphysics," Ganelon commented. "If you can't manipulate Shadow and you can't work the Trumps, it would seem that the next thing to do is determine where we are. And then go looking for help."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I nodded.

"Since we are not in Amber, I think it is safe to assume that we are in Shadow—a very special place, quite near to Amber, since the changeover was not abrupt. In that we were transported without active cooperation on our part, there had to be some agency and presumably some intent behind the maneuver. If it is going to attack us, now is as good a time as any. If there is something else it wants, then it is going to have to show us, because we aren't even in a position to make a good guess."

"I propose we wait. I don't see any value in wandering about, losing ourselves further."

"I seem to remember your once telling me that adjacent shadows tend to be somewhat congruent," Ganelon said.

"Yes, I probably did. So what?"

"Then, if we are as near to Amber as you suppose, we need but ride toward the rising sun to come to a spot that parallels the city itself."

"It is not quite that simple. But supposing it were, what good would it do us?"

"Perhaps the Trumps would function again at the point of maximum congruity."

Random looked at Ganelon, looked at me.

"That may be worth trying," he said. "What have we got to lose?"

"Whatever small orientation we still possess," I said. "Look, it is not a bad idea. If nothing develops here, we will try it. However, looking back, it seems that the road behind us closes in direct proportion to the distance we advance. We are not simply moving in space. Under these circumstances, I am loathe to wander until I am satisfied that we have no other option. If someone desires our presence at a particular location it is up to him now to phrase the invitation a little more legibly. We wait."

They both nodded. Random began to dismount, then froze, one foot in the stirrup, one on the ground.

". . . .After all these years," he said, and, "I never really believed it. . . ."

"What is it?" I whispered.

"The option," he said, and he mounted again.

He persuaded his horse to move very slowly, forward. I followed, and a moment later I glimpsed it, white as I had seen it in the Grove, standing, half-hid, amid a clump of ferns: the unicorn.

It turned as we moved, and seconds later flashed ahead, to stand, partly concealed once more by the trunks of several trees.

"I see it!" Ganelon whispered. "To think there really is such a beast. . . Your family's emblem, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"A good sign, I'd say."

I did not answer, but followed, keeping it in sight. That it was meant to be followed, I did not doubt.

It had a way of remaining partly concealed the entire while—looking out from behind something, passing from cover to cover, moving with an incredible



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swiftness when it did more, avoiding open areas, favoring glade and shade. We followed, deeper and deeper into the wood which had given up all semblance of anything to be found on Kolvir's slopes. It resembled Arden now, more than anything else near Amber, as the ground was relatively level and the trees grew more and more stately.

An hour'd passed, I'd guessed, and another'd followed it, before we came to a small, clear stream and the unicorn turned and headed up it. As we rode along the bank, Random commented, "This is starting to look sort of familiar."

"Yes," I said, "but only sort of. I can't quite say why."

"Nor I."

We entered upon a slope shortly thereafter, and it grew steeper before very long. The going became more difficult for the horses, but the unicorn adjusted its pace to accommodate them. The ground became rockier, the trees smaller. The stream curved in its splashing course. I lost track of its twists and turns, but we were finally nearing the top of the small mount up which we had been traveling.

We achieved a level area and continued along it toward the wood from which the stream issued. At this point, I caught an oblique view—ahead and to the right, through a place where the land fell away—of an icy blue sea, quite far below us.

"We're pretty high up," Ganelon said. "It seemed like lowland, but—"

"The Grove of the Unicorn!" Random interrupted. "That's what it looks like! See!"

Nor was he incorrect. Ahead lay an area strewn with boulders. In their midst a spring uttered the stream we followed. This place was larger and more lush, its situation incorrect in terms of any internal compass. Yet the similarity had to be more than coincidental. The unicorn mounted the rock nearest the spring, looked at us, then turned away. It might have been staring down at the ocean.

Then, as we continued, the grove, the unicorn, the trees about us, the stream beside us, took on an unusual clarity, all, as though each were radiating some special illumination, causing it to quiver with the intensity of its color while at the same time wavering, slightly, just at the edges of perception. This produced, in me, an incipient feeling like the beginning of the emotional accompaniment to a hellride.

Then, then and then, with each stride of my mount, something went out of the world about us. An adjustment in the relationships of objects suddenly occurred, eroding my sense of depth, destroying perspective, rearranging the display of articles within my field of vision, so that everything presented its entire outer surface without simultaneously appearing to occupy an increased area: angles predominated, and relative sizes seemed suddenly ridiculous. Random's horse reared and neighed, massive, apocalyptic, instantly recalling *Guernica* to my



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mind. And to my distress, I saw that we ourselves had not been untouched by the phenomenon—but that Random, struggling with his mount, and Ganelon, still managing to control Kiredrake, had, like everything else, been transfigured by this Cubist dream of space.

But Star was a veteran of many a hellride; Firedrake, also, had been through a lot. We clung to them and felt the movements that we could not accurately guage. And Random succeeded, at last, in imposing his will upon his mount, though the prospect continued to alter as we advanced.

Light values shifted next. The sky grew black, not as night, but like a flat, non-reflecting surface. So did certain vacant areas between objects. The only light left in the world seemed to originate from things themselves, and all of it was gradually bleached. Various intensities of white emerged from the planes of existence, and brightest of all, immense, awful, the unicorn suddenly reared, pawing at the air, filling perhaps ninety percent of creation with what became a slow motion gesture I feared would annihilate us if we advanced another pace.

Then there was only the light.

Then absolute stillness.

Then the light was gone and there was nothing. Not even blackness. A gap in existence, which might have lasted an instant or an eternity. . .

Then the blackness returned, and the light. Only they were reversed. Light filled the interstices, outlining voids that must be objects. This first sound that I heard was the rushing of water, and I knew somehow that we were halted beside the spring. The first thing that I felt was Star's quivering. Then I smelled the sea.

Then the Pattern came into view, or a distorted negative of it. . .

I leaned forward and more light leaked around the edges of things. I leaned back; it went away. Forward again, this time farther than before. . .

The light spread, introduced various shades of gray into the scheme of things. With my knees then, gently, I suggested that Star advance.

With each pace, something returned to the world. Surfaces, textures, color. . .

Behind me, I heard the others begin to follow. Below me, the Pattern surrendered nothing of its mystery, but it acquired a context which, by degress, found its place within the larger reshaping of the world about us.

Continuing downhill, a sense of depth reemerged. The sea, now plainly visible off to the right, underwent a presumably purely optical separation from the sky, with which it seemed momentarily to have been joined in some sort of *Urmeer* of the waters above and the waters below. Unsettling upon reflection, but unnoted while in effect. We were heading down a steep, rocky incline, which seemed to have taken its beginning at the rear of the grove to which the unicorn had led us. Perhaps a hundred meters below us was a perfectly level area



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which appeared to be solid, unfractured rock—roughly oval in shape, a couple hundred meters across its major axis. The slope down which we rode swung off to the left and returned, describing a vast arc, a parenthesis, half-cupping the smooth shelf. Beyond its rightward jutting there was nothing—that is to say, the land feel away in steep descent toward the sea.

And, continuing, all three dimensions reasserted themselves once more, in proper fashion. The sun was that great orb of molten gold we had seen earlier. The sky was a deeper blue than that of Amber, and there were no clouds in it. The sea was a matching blue, unspecked by sail or island. I saw no birds, and I heard no sounds other than our own. An enormous silence lay upon this place, this day. In the bowl of my suddenly clear vision, the Pattern at last achieved its disposition upon the surface below. I thought, at first, that it was inscribed in the rock, but as we drew nearer I saw that it was contained within it—gold-pink swirls, like veining in an exotic marble, natural-seeming despite the obvious purpose to the design.

I drew rein and the others came up beside me, Random to my right, Ganelon to my left.

We regarded it in silence for a long while. A dark, rough-edged smudge had obliterated an area of the section immediately beneath us, running from its outer rim to the center.

"You know," Random finally said, "it is as if someone had shaved the top off Kolvir, cutting at about the level of the dungeons."

"Yes," I said.

"Then—looking for congruence—that would be about where our own Pattern lies."

"Yes," I said again.

". . . .And that blotted area is to the south, from whence comes the black road."

I nodded slowly, as the understanding arrived and forged itself into a certainty.

"What does it mean?" he asked. "It seems to correspond to the true state of affairs, but beyond that I do not understand its significance. Why have we been brought here and shown this thing?"

"It does not correspond to the true state of affairs," I said. "It *is* the true state of affairs."

Ganelon turned toward us.

"On that shadow earth we visited—where you had spent so many years—I heard a poem about two roads that diverged in a wood," he said. "It ends, 'I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.' When I heard it, I thought of something you had once said—'All roads lead to Amber'—and I wondered then, as I do now, at the difference the choice may make, despite the end's apparent inevitability to those of your blood."

"You know?" I said. "You understand?"

"I think so."

He nodded, then pointed.

"That is the real Amber down there, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, it is."

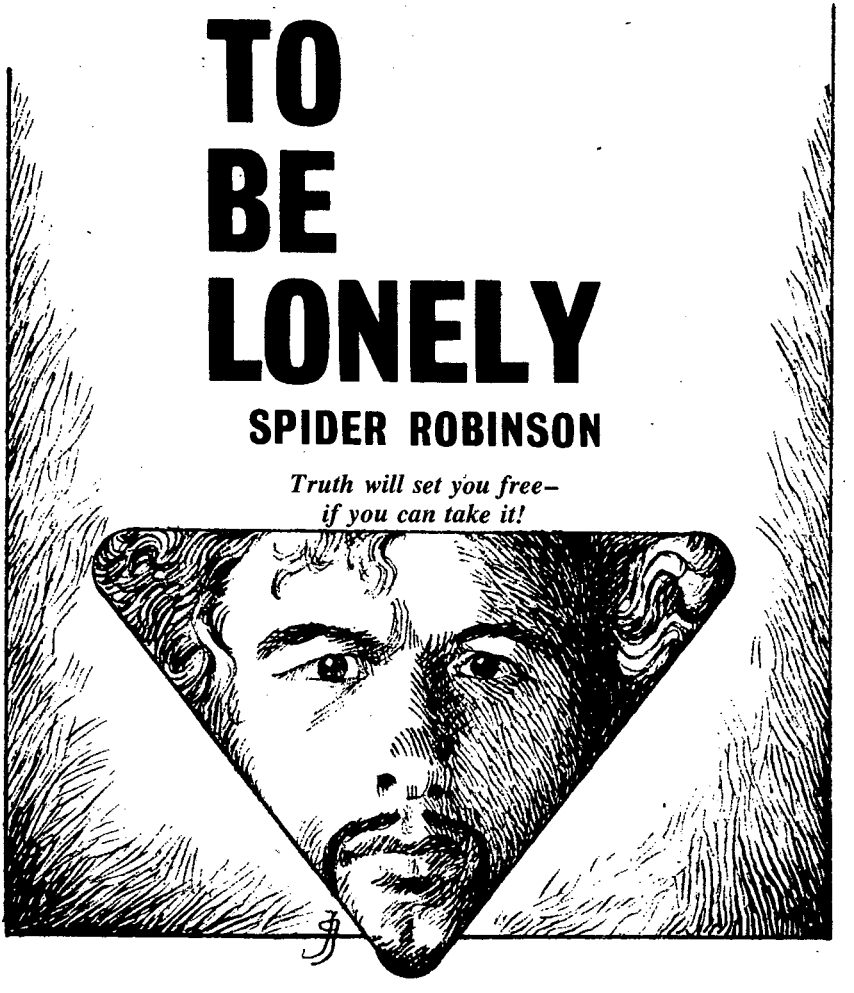


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# NOBODY LIKES TO BE LONELY

## SPIDER ROBINSON

*Truth will set you free—*
*if you can take it!*





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE ROOM looked quite comfortable when they brought McGinny in and left him alone. He had seen pictures, and knew what it was. But in his guts he could not believe that it was a cell.

It didn't look like a cell. It didn't taste like a cell, or feel like one, but most of all it didn't look like one. McGinny had been in jail once before, in this same county, and the cell then had borne all the classic hallmarks: bars, mildewed concrete walls, barred windows, an absurdly large look, and miserably inadequate sanitary provisions consisting of a seatless toilet which stubbornly refused to flush and a badly-cracked sink which exuded brown, rusty water.

But then, that had been so long ago that the charge for which McGinny had done time was possession of marijuana. That statue, while it still existed, had not been enforced in over ten years.

And in the meantime, prisons had changed. They had had to, of course. The Attica Uprising and the Tombs Rebellion, the Joliet Massacre and the Battle of New Alcatraz had been unmistakable signs that the traditional approach to penology was obsolete. A criminal population approaching thirty percent of the total simply could not be herded together and kept safely subjugated without the very sort of brutalization which an informed public would no longer tolerate.

But what if they were not herded together?

So it was that the room which met McGinny's eyes now was in appearance a pleasant, modestly appointed studio apartment—with a few anomalies. The convict seated himself in a remarkably comfortable, high-backed psuedo-leather armchair, padded with God alone knew what, and surveyed the unit which would be his universe until the time-lock on the room's only door ran out, ten years from now. *Lookit all the cubic*, he told himself wonderingly. Maybe this wouldn't be too bad after all.

The time-lock itself, not unnaturally, was the first thing that held his eye. It was set just below the apparently open window which was cut into the door of his cell. All that faced on his side of the door was an inverted triangular plate with rounded corners, small horizontal grooved slots in each corner. The overall effect was damnably like a skull.

"Pleased to meet ya," McGinny told it, returning its sour grin.

The window above the plate measured about three by three, and appeared empty of glass. So did the window on the opposite wall behind McGinny, but both were in fact enclosed with a synthetic material (trade-named "Nothing") which was so transpar-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ent as to appear invisible. It could not break, crack or get dirty. The second window looked out on a small courtyard, pleasantly landscaped with ferns and lush grasses, bordered by three fifteen-story wings just like the one which held McGinny's cell. The seven hundred and fifty windows of each were opaque, and McGinny knew that his too seemed opaque from the outside. He sighed.

To his left was a bed, consisting of a mattress on top of a sealed box-spring which was clamped to the floor. Although the room's climate-control system made bedclothes superfluous, the penologists had been thoughtful enough to realize that a man (or woman) felt better with something over him as he slept. Hence they proved a sheet—made of paper. Above the bed were two horizontal slits, about a half-inch thick each. The upper one would dispense either paper sheets or paper clothes. It was activated by placing a used sheet or garment in the lower slot, which led to an incinerator somewhere in the bowels of the prison. Two pillows lay on the bed, each a featureless sponge.

Filling the space between the head of the bed and the corner of the room was a closet without a door. It had no transversing pole from which to suspend hangers, nor did it have hangers. Instead, suits of paper clothing—there were four of them—hung from small extrusions of plasteel high on the rear wall of the closet.

In the opposite corner, behind McGinny and to the right, was a spacious desk with voicewriter and rawing pencils. Above the desk was a reader which would display any book requested, page by page, so long as it was stored in the prison's central computer. Much of the fiction available was speculative, the authorities having decided that it would be all right to allow prisoners *some* form of escape. (McGinny knew that lately, the majority of science-fiction writers were ex-criminals, some of whose output was quite disturbing. Or perhaps that was not a new development.)

To the left of the desk was a quadio console, also computer-supplied, its four speakers represented by darker areas at four corners of the ceiling. Available tapes ranged from classical through rock to flash, with side-trips into gregorian and neojazz. The console was nearly featureless: one spoke one's choice and selected tone and volume with simple slide switches. In appearance, therefore, the console resembled a washing machine with two small horns.

Directly adjacent to the quadio was the Automat: an equally large cube, with a serving platform let into its front and small slots on



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

either side which dispensed rubber cutlery. It too was voice-activated, and was fed through the floor from a master unit which supplied the Automat with raw materials. Save for the absence of a slot into which to deposit one's quarters, it was identical to the Automats to be found on the average street corner—from McGinny's angle of vision at least. From the other end of the room one could have seen the unmistakable, time-honored shape of a toilet bowl, let into the Automat's left side. It drained to the prison's basement, where paper and waste were filtered out and the remainder routed to the master food unit. This saved the taxpayers millions of dollars annually.

McGinny snorted, ceased his inventory of the room and rose from his chair. He went to the small sink on the right of the cell door and regarded himself in its "mirror," a glassless reflective surface. As McGinny was one of many who had elected to inhibit his beard, there was no shaving unit next to the mirror; his hair would simply have to grow for the next ten years, or until he became sick enough to warrant the cutting open of the time-lock to permit a doctor to attend him. The doctor played a lot of golf.

Familiar, coarse features stared back at McGinny, restoring his confidence. His head was large, with a cap of wiry brown curls resting on elongated ears. His eyes were set close against a blunt nose, and his overfull lower lip gave him a pouting, petulant expression. As he saw again the room whose reflection surrounded his own, the pout became almost a sneer. These were the most spacious and luxurious quarters he had ever inhabited—few in the overcrowded world of 2007 had it so good.

*Ten years?* he thought cheerfully. *I'll do it standing on my head. Elbow room, privacy, food cooked for me. . .* He frowned. *Sure will miss beer, though. And the fems.* His contentment beginning to fade, he returned to the armchair and dropped heavily into it. He found his gaze fixed on the window set in the cell door. It was strange—the window on the opposite wall looked out on open space, this one onto a plasteel corridor. And yet the exterior window gave a view of a false freedom, sculpted to make McGinny and other thousands feel better. In the corridor, men walked. Somehow, freedom was that way.

He shifted, scratched his crotch and considered the quadio. It seemed to him that his first choice in this cell was a significant event, demanding contemplation. He imagined himself ten years hence, narrating his prison saga to an enraptured fem with eyes like saucers, saying, "And do you



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know what the first thing I played in that taken place was?" This'd better be good; he'd hate to have to lie to her.

After a time he addressed the quadio. The room filled with the sound of a frenzied 4/4 piano solo from Leon Russell's legendary last album, *Live At Luna City*. Bass and moog came in together as the Master of Space and Time hurled his anthem:

*"I'm just tryin' to stay 'live–and keep mah sideburns too."*

LEGS TREMBLING, vaguely enjoying the play of cool air across his sweat-sheened, slender body, Solomon Orechal lay in the utter relaxation called afterglow and surveyed his bedroom. In so doing, he also surveyed his dining room, his living room, his kitchen and his car—all at the same time.

He sighed, for perhaps the dozenth time that day; just as, in fact, he had sighed with an almost rhythmic regularity on every day since he had first moved into his own Mome, from the comparative spaciousness of his parents' fish-and-see apartment. As the popular name indicated, a good efficiency was hard to find these days, but the Orechal ancestral apt (the building dated all the way back to 1957) had been in family possession since before the Housing Riots—as the axe-scar and single bullet-hole in the door attested. Solomon had told himself often in the last two years that he had been a fool to strike out on his own. But the lure of adventure and the challenge of living wherever he could find a parking space had been enough to pry him from the four-and-a-half-room home of his youth.

Besides, it was awkward, bringing your girlfriends into the bathroom to be alone.

Apropos of which:

*It's very strange*, thought Solomon. *I know just what she's going to say now. . .*

"Sol, why can't we do the Truth Dope?"

*. . .and yet there's nothing deja vu about it.*

Beside him on the narrow bed, Barbara raised on one elbow, half-leaned across him. Sleepily, earnestly, she brushed the hair out of his eyes and repeated, "Why won't you do Truth with me, lover?"

*. . .even down to the soft but oh so insistent tone of voice, the way she lets her left breast brush me; and it's just nothing at all like deja vu. . .*

She was still talking, and there was that in her voice which acts directly on the glands, but he was miles ahead of her, his attention two levels removed, contemplating the frustration of Moebius's Band with what seemed a poignant bitterness. Vaguely, he monitored the persuasions and importunities, dropping a grunt here



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and there and looking impassive, until he heard the line he had been patiently waiting for.

". . .how," she was saying, timidly and inevitably, "can I help but think you're afraid of the Truth?"

His timing was magnificent.

"Afraid of the truth?" he asked quietly, paused. "What we just did. . .wasn't that the truth?" He brushed his fingertips along the underside of her belly, and she shivered. "Are you suggesting that that wasn't real? That we were just *fucking*? Because it sure seemd to *me* that we were making love. Maybe I was wrong."

He had her now, he knew it from the look on her face, but somehow he couldn't summon up the old elation, the sense of triumph. Mechanically, he moved in for the coup-de-grace: now that you've stirred up the emotions, throw in a little pseudologic and you're home free.

"You know why I don't do Truth Dope, man. I've told you a dozen times. I'm not afraid of the truth, I'm afraid of the *dope*."

She made one last try. "But Sol. . ."

"Now don't start, Barb. We've been through this, kark it. There's a mountain of evidence for each side, just like there always is when a new drug comes out. The law says it plays hob with your motivations, and the heads say it clears your vision. The law says it rots your body, and the heads say it's a lie. You know what happened with pot." (It hadn't been until 1986 that it was proven that marijuana could cause tuberculosis. No real problem, as they had TB licked by that time—one shot at 12 and you couldn't get it if you tried—but it was too late for an awful lot of smokers who had thought that all the evidence was in by 1975.) "I lost my mother to TB, and I plan for the rest of my life to take the conservative opinion wherever possible. No thanks, Barb. I'll take my Truth the sloppy, human way, through inference and deduction. Maybe I'll be wrong a lot more often. . .but maybe I'll have a lot more often to be wrong in.

"Besides, I don't need any proof that you love me—even though you're trying to get me to do something I don't think is safe, to reassure *you*. Things like just happened here a couple of minutes ago are all the 'proof' I need."

There was, of course, nothing she could say to that, and she even apologized, but somehow even as he mounted her to prove again the depth of his love by the strength of his hips he knew that the subject wa not closed, and that someday she would back him into a corner he couldn't talk his way out of, and on that day they would share the drug that made dissembly impossible, and she



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would leave him, just like all the others.

He moaned, but she misunderstood and held him tighter.

McGINNY TRIED for the fifth time to cut the leathery soyburger with his rubber fork. This time the disposable plate danced on the serving platform and he nearly lost the meal entirely. He swore a hideous oath and flung the fork angrily from him, but with the blind malignance that inanimate objects display when a man is in a towering rage, it bounced from the plasteel wall and dropped with an absurdly loud, high splash into the toilet.

He rose quickly, cursing with a steady, monotonous rhythm. *Taken stuff tastes enough like rubber already,* he thought savagely, plunging his thick hand into the bowl. He was just too late to save the fork; the cell's designers had reasoned that a flusing mechanism could fail—a serious calamity in a time-locked room—and so that bowl simply emptied itself constantly, at a gentle speed which McGinny had not quite beaten.

Swearing louder now, he straightened and walked to the sink to wash his hands. He could not for the life of him understand why he felt that the water there would be any cleaner than that which laved the bowl, and it irritated him immensely.

Of course he burned his hands. But by that time the anger had reached the point from which one either tremblingly descends, or begins throwing things. He had few things to throw, and none he could spare. He counted to ten, then chanted Om Mani Padme Hum, and gradually the black rage subsided, at least to the point where he could see through the red haze.

*Make the karkin' silverware rubber so we can't snuff ourselves,* he thought, *and look how much good it does. I'm really filled with the joy of livin' now.*

Finally he walked back to the automat, sat down in the desk chair which stood before it, and picked the soyburger from the plate on the serving platform.

It was cold.

"GodDAMNit," he exploded. "Sunnabitchin' machine s'posta keep the taken stuff hot, just my *fuckin'* luck to get the one don't work for TEN TAKEN YEARS!"

There was nothing for it; the soyburger was all he would get until tomorrow morning. Growling, he raised it to his mouth and ripped off a piece with his teeth.

"Hi there."

He whirled, his hand absurdly cocking the soyburger like a weapon. There in the window of the cell door, above the skull-like time-lock, was a face. A person!

McGinny ran to the door, flinging the soyburger into a corner.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hello!" he shouted, and then pulled to a halt before the door, suddenly embarassed. They looked at each other for a while, McGinny seeing a yong kid, maybe twenty, with long blonde hair and a Fu Manchu mustache, *looks like one o' them Trippies, oh Jesus I hope he likes to talk.*

"What are you in for?"

"Embezzlement," McGinny said automatically, a million questions that he could not form coherently enough to ask buzzing in his brain.

"Oh," said the youth, adjusting a uniform cap on his shaggy head. He seemed somehow just slightly disappointed. "I guess that must be pretty interesting stuff, embezzlement. I get to talk to all kinds of interesting people on this job. Once. . .once I talked to a rapist."

He almost seemed to be licking his lips, but McGinny was beyond noticing. He managed to stammer, "Hey, look, buddy. . . what. . .I mean, who are you? What are you doing here? How often do you come around? What. . .hey, how come I can even hear you in here?"

The kid chuckled. "They've got a two-way sound system on the door, man. Didn't you know? Listen, don't freak, I'm, like, the guard. You didn't think they'd leave you alone with nobody to check on you, did you? Suppose you conked?"

"But," McGinny said, ". . .I mean, do you come around alot? *Can you stay a while and talk?*"

"Oh sure," the kid assured him. "That's why I took this job, man. I'm into people, where they're at, like. All I have to do is walk around and talk to interesting people, and I only gotta cover fifteen guys a day. See, if you want to know the truth, the job's welfare."

McGinny understood. The work-and-wage ystem as a means of distributing wealth was on its last legs—there simply wasn't enough work to go around, and the population continued to climb. As a last-ditch stopgap, the government had taken to making up idiot work so that there would be sufficient jobs available to keep the traditional economic system staggering on, but the farce was becoming more obvious every year. What more obvious example than this young Trippie, "guarding" men in sealed plasteel cells to earn his living.

But at this particular moment McGinny was overwhelmingly grateful for the continued sham. It was accidentally providing him with the means of maintaining his sanity.

"Listen," he said urgently, "listen, kid, if you'll come around and talk t me a lot, I'll. . ." He paused, baffled. He had nothing to offer. "I'll be grateful," he finished lamely, desperate with



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fear that he would be rejected.

"Sure, man," the kid grinned. "I like to talk. Mostly I like to listen. I'm interested in the criminal mind and all. I'll bet you've got some interesting stories to tell."

"Yeah, you bet, kid. I got the most *goddamned* interesting stories you ever heard in your life!" He paused again, embarrassed by his fervor.

"Hey, listen, man," the kid said softly. "I know how it is. Nobody likes to be lonely."

And he smiled.

THE MOME ahead completed its business and gunned away noisily, and Sol pulled his own vehicle smoothly up alongside the Chase World Bank. Rolling down the forward driver's-side window, he addressed it.

"Solomon Orechal, 4763987IMHS967403888.453, license NY-45-83-299T."

The Bank, which bore a remarkable resemblance to a vacuum cleaner making love to a garbage can, asked San Francisco a question, received a reply, and answered without a millisecond's hesitation,' "Sir?"

"Request additions and alterations allotment, three thousand dollars and zero cents; travel allotment, five hundred dollars and zero cents."

"Purpose?"

"A and A: Fortrex cooling unit. Travel: to Lesser Yuma."

"Justification?"

"Profession: entertainer."

"Type and Credit Number, please," the Bank said a bit more respectfully. Its voice was like a contralto kazoo.

"Folksinger. Number SWM-44557F, ASCAP. I'm my own agent."

This time the machine actually paused. Barbara squirmed on the seat next to Solomon, twisting her hair nervously. "Aren't you going to get it, lover?"

"Relax," he said easily. "The Bank's got to consult a human for this. Judgement decision required. It's bound to take a minute or so; they've got to decide if I'm worth shipping across the country."

"Oh, Sol. . ."

"Now don't worry, Barb, I told you. If the Bank says no, I'll use my own credit and we'll go just the same. Now relax, will you?"

The squat machine spoke up. "So ordered," it said emotionlessly, "and good luck to you, sir. Have a pleasant time in Lesser Yuma."

"You got it," she said excitedly as Solomon engaged gears and roared away from the Bank, "oh, baby, you got it! When can we go?"

"Get centered, mama," he answered as he slid the huge mobile home smoothly into the freeway traffic. "There's a lot of things we have to do first. We've got to get



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cooling unit installed, gotta cop a big block of food, got to get the engine overhauled and tuned. Gotta say goodbye to our parents. It'll be a couple of days, easy. Less if we bust ass."

Behind his practical words Solomon was immensely pleased with himself. Barbara had been difficult lately, carefully avoiding any mention of Truth Dope but finding more and more reasons to sulk. But he'd managed to find something to distract her. She'd never been out of New York State in her life, and travel held a fascination for her, as for so many. A similar feeling had been responsible for Solomon's decision to buy a Mome in the first place, and so he was somewhat excited about the trip himself.

And too, his ego writhed with gratification that is performing record was in fact impressive enough to make the Bank invest in his relocation to an area where performers were scarce. Consciously he had never doubted the outcome, and he would never admit his subconscious doubts, but it felt good to *know*.

You had to be good to be a performer; it was one of the most sought-after jobs in the country. It wasn't only the tremendous prestige, nor even the almost orgasmic egoboo that applause brought. It was simply that the first time you saw drab, apathetic faces come alive during your set, the first time you made some of those thousands of crowded, useless people a little more content with their lot, somehow you never again felt that gut-ache of uselessness quite so sharply yourself.

"Sol," Barbara said softly, breaking into hi reverie, "do we have to start. . .right away?" Her soft fingers traced a question mark on his thigh.

"Mama," he mock-growled, "I'll never be *that* busy!"

And no one was more surprised than he when, having found a place to park the Mome, he failed to achieve an erection.

"HOW DID YOU ever come to be an embezzler, Mr. McGinny?"

"I embezzled."

"No, I mean why?"

"Because I wanted some money."

The kid was impervious to sarcasm. "What did you want the money for?" He adjusted the guard's cap that looked so incongruous atop his shaggy mane, his hand stroking his mustache on the way down in a mannerism which McGinny suspected he could learn to hate sometime in the next ten years. "I mean, it isn't like way back in the seventies when people were hungry."

"Listen, what is, a quiz show or something? I mean, what's it to you?"

"Oh, I'm just curious, is all. I



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mean, there's nothing much else to do on this job but talk with you fellows. Anyway, crime interests me, you know? Like the things that made you end up. . .in here."

"Well it's none of your taken business, how do you like that?" McGinny snapped. The kid made as if to turn away, and suddenly McGinny almost panicked. The kid was a pain in the joints, but he was better than nothing, better than the tangled, tormenting company of McGinny's own thoughts, of his self-recrimination and his frustrated rage.

"No, wait, kid. Listen, I'm sorry, please wait. You. . .you don't want to lift off so soon. C'mon, look: a guy gets a little hot under the collar sometimes, you ask him personal questions. I didn't mean any offense."

The kid half-turned back to the door, stroking his mustache again.

"Look, it was like this, see? I'm an accountant, I was I mean, and they pulled an audit at the wrong time. No big story—I just got caught with my hand in the cookie jar. Could have happened to a dozen other accountants, just happened to be me, that's all."

"Why'd you have your hand in the cookie jar?"

"I needed the money." There was a pause, and the kid turned to walk away again.

McGinny cracked. "It was a fem, dammit."

The kid turned back again, smiling now. A gentle smile. "Yeah?"

McGinny gave in. Maybe the kid was right—it might help to talk about it, straighten his thoughts. In any case it was certainly better than trying to think of something new to play on the quadio. Or something to dictate into the voicewriter, which stubbornly refused to do anything more than repeat his own thoughts back to him.

"It was like this: I had to get my hands on a whole lot of money at once to shut this fem up. She had something on me that could have ruined me, had me by the hairs, and she loved every minute of it, the little slot. She had it in for me, but she needed green more than she needed my scalp, and she didn't even care if I got burned gettin' it. 'You're an accountant,' she says. 'You can get it.' Sure. Easy. Ten years easy, and she walks away laughing. I had a chance, I'd be in here for murder right now."

The kid was all ears now, face almost pressed up against the cell window like a child at a candy-store window. "What'd she have on you?" he breathed.

McGinny turned bright red. The kid didn't bother to pretend to leave again; he simply waited. After a time the prisoner answered him.

"See, she was. . . she was preg-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nant without a license, and she was far enough along she was going to start showing any day, and she said when they hauled her in she was going to name me in the affadavit. The pregnancy fine alone could have ruined me, let alone the Lifetime Child Support without even a welfare option. I mean, every man's entitled to welfare, isn't he? You can see what a jam I was in. I just had to have the green—she said if I gave her enough money to keep her and the kid until she could leave him with a sitter and go to work, she'd tell the Man she didn't know who the father was."

"I don't get it," the kid said cheerfully. "What was the sweat? You'd have beat the heat easy. Kark, they couldn't pin an Elsie's on you—it's your word against hers. Unless there was a photographic record of the conception. . ." his voice trailed off with just the faintest suggestion of a leer.

McGinny shrugged, made a face. "Well, maybe they couldn't have pinned an L.C.S. on me, if it came to that. . ." He seemed disinclined to continue.

"Then I don't understand why you took such a risk," the kid persisted.

"Well," McGinny said reluctantly, "I. . .I got a wife and kids."

"Oh," the kid said brightly. "Have you got a picture of them?"

*"No I have not got a karkin' picture of them!"*

"All right, all right, don't jump salty. I can take a hint. Sorry if I bothered you." The kid gave his mustache a final tug, turned and walked out of view down the corridor. Suddenly terrified, not wanting to be alone with his memories, McGinny beat against the door with his fists.

"Wait, damn you, *wait*! Hold on a taken minute, I didn't mean to shout at you. Hey listen, I'm sorry, wait, come back, poease come back. Come back you bastard you, don't leave me alone. You sonofabitch, I'll cut your heart out, *COME BACK*!"

Footsteps echoed faintly down the acoustically-muffled hallway.

McGinny looked down at his hands stupidly. They ached terribly, and the heels of them glowed an angry red. He went to the mirror on shaky legs, tried a sickly grin, then whirled and threw himself across the bed, and very suddenly he was crying, the wild, racking sobs of a child.

SOL LOOKED AROUND at the hundreds of prairie rats who made up a cross-section of the population of this particular sector of Lesser Juma, brushed the guitar strap out of the way of his wrist, and adjusted the microphone with a feeling of growing desperation. He wasn't reaching them, he just couldn't get it on for this



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

audience, and he felt a frustration which was growing familiar of late.

*It's the people,* he told himself frantically, tuning up to stall for time. There was plenty of parking space left in the deserts, and hence a trouble-free existence for Mome-owners who could afford cooling gear. But the thousands who had flocked to the vast barren expanses had learned quickly that boredom was the price of exurban existence. They looked to entertainers like Solomon to keep them going, but the wary ennui they brought to a concert depressed him so much (he told himself now) that he just couldn't seem to get into his music tonight.

In desperation, he seized upon a song that summed up his mood precisely, one of his own. For the first time in his career he didn't care how the audience liked it, whether it was what they wanted to hear. He hurt, and so he sang.

*This time next year. . . . .*
*I will have won or lost*
*This time next year. . . . .*
*my bridges all*
*will be crossed*
*I'll either be*
*in headlines*
*Or standin' in*
*the breadlines*
*It all depends*
*on how the dice are tossed*
*This time next year. . . . .*
*I will be up or down*
*Far away from here. . . . .*
*or still hung up in town*
*I'll either be in clover*
*Or barely turnin' over*
*It all depends on how*
*the deal goes down*
*I feel it comin' on–*
*it's O so close now*
*Wonder if it's*
*bad or good*
*Hope it isn't gonna be*
*an overdose now*
*Really wish I knew*
*where I stood*
*This time next year. . . .*
*I'll either win or lose*
*This time I fear. . . . .*
*I'm on a short, short fuse*
*I'll either be together*
*Enjoin' sunny weather*
*Or suckin' up*
*an awful lot of booze*

He trailed off, fingers stinging from the harsh, emphatic runs. The catharsis of the bluew left him literally exhausted, but the pain was reduced to an empty, fading ache.

The applause nearly frightened him out of his wits.

From then on he had them, had them in the palm of his hand. Having made them cry, he could now make them laugh, or clap, or dance, or anything he had a mind to. He had shown them that he shared something with them, and now they could empathize, let themselves be taken with him along whatever musical road he chose to pick.

It felt good.

It was on the way home, joyfully breaking the speed limit and humming snatches of his closing number, that he heard the news from Barbara.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sol?"

"Yeah, kitten? Here, have a toke."

"Later." She waved the joint away. "Sol, the clinic called while you were onstage. I came out to get my shawl and played back the message."

"Oh."

There was a pause.

"Sol, they said. . .the results were negative."

A longer pause, long enough for humiliation to turn to anger.

"Well what the hell is that supposed to mean? Why, they're full of shit. Negative! What is that supposed to signify, it's all in my karkin' mind? Is that it?"

She was silent, and his fury boiled over.

"ANSWER ME, GODDAMMIT! Is it all in my mind?"

"Sol, I don't *know*, baby, I don't know. Maybe they made a mistake." She was crying, soundless tears highlighted by oncoming headlights, and he flung the joint out the window in disgust.

"Don't make excuses for me, you taken slot! It's no big deal. So the results were negative, so there's a little something I got to work out in my head is all. You know I've got it. I just have to get it back."

He drove on furiously, concentrating on the road until his eyes ached from squinting. They left the Mome colony behind, took a seemingly-abandoned side-road up into the hills. The road swerved treacherously beside sheer precipices at some points, but Sol had his control back now, and his hands on the steering wheel were unnaturally steady. The ponderous Mome was like a live thing under his hands, and he drove it with a grim determination. Eventually they passed through a great shadow-filled crevice between two walls of granite, and came out upon a ridge overlooking a great valley, invisible in the darkness.

There were only seven or eight Momes parked here, clustered around the natural mountain spring which surfaced in this unlikely spot. It was sufficiently long that there was at least an acre for each of them. Solomon had been lucky to find this place, the few who had tended to keep their mouths shut. *We are all very happy here,* he thought savagely, wheeling the huge Mome to its parking space.

He parked, shut down the engine, extruded the watersucker and threw power to the house generator. Pushing the button that dropped the seat-back flat, he got up and walked to the back of the Mome, flinging himself down on the bed without a word.

Barbara got up and walked slowly back to the bed, sat down on the carpeted floor beside it.

"Sol, what do we do now?"

"What the kark can I do?" he



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, voice muffled by the pillow.

"Well, as far as I can see, there's only two things left. Analysis, or. . ."

"Or the Truth Dope," he snarled, lifting his head to throw her a venomous glance. "Get my head candled or my chromosomes scrambled, that's the choice, huh?"

"Well, all I know is I'm pretty karkin' sick and tired of masturbating," she shot back, and then gasped.

He winced.

"I'm sorry, baby," she said pitifully. "You know I didn't mean that."

"Well, it's true, and there's nothing I can do about it," he barked. "I'll be go to hell before I'll let some professional voyeur probe into my sex-life. Analysis! No thanks, mama. If there's anything wrong with me, I'll fix it myself. I'm not about to have some fumble-fingered idiot 'adjusting' my personlity for me."

"Then do some truth, lover," she pleaded. "Just once, do Truth with me. Once we know what it is, we've got it licked. It'll never bother us again."

He tried to stall for time. "Ah, we'd never find a connection for Truth out here in the sticks. Forget it, mama. It'll pass."

She bit her lip. "Sol. . .I've got some here. I brought it with us from New York."

He stared at her, mouth dry, and knew that it was all over.

"Sol, please baby, take it with me. Honey, I don't want to live with a man who's. . .who's impotent."

It was the first time either of them had said the word, but he didn't explode as she had half expected him to. He only buried his head in the pillow for a long, long time, tasting defeat, accepting what was to come. At last he raised himself up on his elbows and regarded her levelly.

"Okay, Barbara," he said quietly. "We'll do Truth."

*Shakin'!*
*Taken!*
*All forsaken!*
*I think I got to*
*flash now, mama,*
*Believe I got to flash!*

MCGINNY SLUMPED in his chair, growling along with the fuzzbass. The quadio's separation was improperly adjusted, forcing him to hold his head at an uncomfortable angle. By now this had produced a permanent crick in his neck, which had a serious effect on his peace of mind, not to mention his taste. The snarling flash tune he had opted for was symptomatic of a growing unease (as, in startlingly close analogy, it was with flash freaks outside the prison). The ex-accountant was seething with frustrated rage, and would not understand why.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The moog took a solo on the left front speaker, began pouring on the watts. With a treble shriek, the speaker went dead.

McGinny howled with rage, sprang from the chair and stood under the speaker, cursing fulminously.

He leaped upward and smashed his fist at the darkened area behind which the dead speaker crouched, accomplishing nothing whatever. "Ten years," he gibbered, "Ten *years!*" He began slamming his fists against the near wall, flaying the limits of his universe with a black hatred. His eye was caught by the skull face of the time-lock, grinning reminder of the unpaid balance of his sentence, and he struck at it savagely, fracturing two knuckles on its hard surface.

His bellow of pain chopped off in the middle as he saw his jailer watching him from a foot away. The kid's face held a clinical interest; his cornflower-blue eyes gazed with infuriating calmness into McGinny's.

"Off," the prisoner snarled over his shoulder at the paraplegic quadio, which went completely silent at once. "What the hell are you staring at?" he demanded of the young guard.

"Why'd you hurt your hand?" the kid asked.

McGinny checked an angry retort. This kid was just too dumb to know any better, he decided. "Ah, the karkin' quadio blew a speaker," he grumbled.

"Looks okay from here," the kid said.

"Well, it doesn't sound okay from here," McGinny snapped. "Left front channel's gone."

"Gee, that's a beat," the kid acknowledged. "They wouldn't crack the lock for something. . ."

"I know they wouldn't crack the lock for something like that," McGinny barked. "What the hell you rub it in for?" His hand began to throb, the numbness wearing off now.

"I didn't mean to rub it in, Mr. McGinny. I just thought you mighta thought. . ."

"Well-I-didn't-so-just-shut-up-about-it-all-right?" the prisoner said through grated teeth. Kark, this kid was dumb!

"Sure. Hey listen, wow, I meant to ask you. You never told me about how come you let that fem talk you into taking the green." The jailer tugged at his mustache and regarded McGinny expectantly.

McGinny turned, took a few steps from the window. Then he frowned and turned back resignedly. "It's like I told you: she was going to stick it to me."

"Yeah, but she couldn't prove a thing. Or could she?"

"She didn't have to prove it. I told you I got a wife and kids, didn't I? What do you think my wife'd do, I'm down in Paternity



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Court? What do you think my boss'd do? Bigshot Z.P.G. supporter, he'd toss me on the street in a minute. It ain't like if I sold illegal dope or run over somebody stoned. You can't get fired for criminal record any more. But an unlicensed pregnancy? A third kid? Don't make me laugh. She didn't have to prove a thing to finish me off."

"Yeah, I guess I see. . ." said the kid. "But one thing I don't understand. . ."

"You don't understand nothing. You never been married. I'd have done anything to keep Alice from leaving me. Anything." His voice broke. "I. . .I loved her."

"That's what I don't understand," the kid said eagerly. "I mean, if you loved her so much, how come you topped this other fem? I mean, sure, everybody likes variety once in a while, but you must have a House in your neighborhood, you must have had the money."

"Hey listen, I never paid for it in my life," McGinny said proudly. "I mean, half the thrill of love is in the conquest." He had read that somewhere.

"So then, since your wife was already 'conquered' she didn't turn you on?"

"Of course she turned me on. I told you I loved her, didn't I? But there was this fem I met at the Automat, worked in the same building, and she looked like she never had it, you know? So I called her up that night, invited her out for a drive."

"Top her that night?" the kid exclaimed.

"Well, sure," McGinny said modestly. "You know, I kind of always had good luck with bargains."

"Plural? You mean there were others?"

"Not too karkin' many others. I told you I loved my wife," McGinny said suspiciously.

"But you said. . ."

"I know what I karkin' said," McGinny barked.

"Okay, take it easy. I was just asking. 'Cause I thought you meant. . ."

"Well, keep your thoughts to yourself. Jesus, you ask a lot of dopey questions. What's the matter, you got nothing better. . ." His voice trailed off as he caught himself. "I mean, what makes you so taken curious?"

"Oh, I just wonder a lot. You know, how come you're in there and I'm out here and all—I've always been kind of *philosophical*, you know? Into people, like I said. I mean, we all start out the same, and some of us do things others don't. I guess I'm just curious about what makes people tick. How come she got pregnant?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, don't you use anything?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, sure, but I mean, I didn't know. Hell, first date and all, I. . .I just figured she'd be using something. Nice piece like that. . ."

"But you said she looked like a virgin."

"Well, that's it, see? How was I supposed to know she'd spread right off like that?"

"But you just *said* you always had good luck with. . ."

"Get off my case, will you? I'm telling you, this fem was a slot. She. . .she told me it was all right, see, because she wanted to get me by the pills, pump me for green, get it?"

"Look, I don't know, you were there and I wasn't, but frankly that sounds like a load of used food to me," the kid said evenly. "You told me all she asked for was support until she could work again, didn't you? And just for that she was willing to take the rap and lose her own Welfare. Doesn't sound like a slot to me."

"Get out of here, you fuzz-faced stuffer! Who the hell asked for your opinion, anyway? Go on, get taken before I. . ."

"Before you what, bro?" the kid asked softly. "You can't get out of there, can you? You can't even snuff yourself to embarass me. I'm not a captive audience, but you're sure a captive performer. I don't understand what you did, and you're going to explain it to me. Sooner or later."

"I'll see you in hell first," McGinny shouted, almost gibbering from helpless rage.

"Sooner or later," he repeated, tugging at his mustache.

McGinny's eyes widened, and he placed a hand on either side of the window. "You're enjoying this, aren't you? You little nark, you're really enjoying this!"

"Does that matter?" the kid asked softly. "Does it really make any difference whether I enjoy it or not? All I'm doing is asking you questions. The answers you already know yourself, right? Or you couldn't answer the questions. I'm not putting any words in your mouth—just asking questions so I can understand why you did what you did. All I want," he said simply, "is the truth."

"You want it, you clinical little bastard, but maybe *I don't*," McGinny snarled.

"Oh, well. . ." said the kid, shrugging. "There I can't help you, Mr. McGinny. I mean, even if I don't ask you another thing, you've got ten years to go, and there's noplace to hide in there. How long you think you can duck the truth?"

"Forever, you lousy bastard," McGinny roared. "Get out of my life, go on, get the hell out of here." He turned away in dismissal, began pacing the room angrily. *I don't have to take this kind of sewage! I'll write to the Warden, to my Congressman,*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*to. . . .* he stopped suddenly, struck by the obvious. Prisoners lost all their civil rights —including access to the postal computer network. His voicewriter lacked the familiar "Transmit" key. There was no way for him to get a letter to *anyone*, unless the kid agreed to take it down for him and deliver it.

*Somebody else has got to come by, sooner or later,* he thought frantically. *A maintenance man, somebody!*

No one had so far.

He was trapped, pure and simple, trapped with this shaggy punk kid with his words that twisted the truth into lies and made you feel like you'd done something wrong, like you deserved all this instead of merely being caught up in a web of circumstances that could have happened to anybody. *The little stuffer'll be back, to pick at me and twist everything all up. Enjoys it, like he was pulling the wings off flies, like. . .*

He spun around angrily, and the kid was still there, his face framed in the window over the skull-like time-lock.

"Spying on me, you. . ." McGinny groped for words.

"No," the kid murmured. "Just. . .just *observing* you."

McGinny howled.

THE DRUG which Solomon Orechal's age knew as Truth Dope had been known to man for hundreds of years before a single word was ever written about it. Known, that is, to some men.

The first words written about Truth Dope appeared in the middle Twentieth Century. Author William Burroughs passed on a legend of unknown origin concerning a forgotten tribe in the trackless wilds of South America who used a drug he called "yage," which induced temporary mental telepathy between its users. The brief mention was too preposterous to be taken very seriously, of course, but there were many in those times who took preposterous things seriously. Rumors traveled the junkie grapevine, apocrypha rode the dealers' trail, and the A-heads spoke in whispers of yage.

In vain. Yage existed, and its ridiculous Lost Tribe as well. But they were not exactly lost.

They were hidden.

For the telepathy that its users experienced under the influence of yage was more than the ability to send and receive messages without material aid. It was rather a total dissolution of all the walls surrounding human consciousness, a complete opening of minds one to the other, providing the first and only escape from the solitary confinement of the human skull. It was a melding of personalities, a stripping away of all cover.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two people who took yage simply had no secrets from one another. At all.

Secret thoughts, inner motivations, hopes, shames, dreams, pretenses, likes and dislikes and the true inner feelings of that part of the heart whose name is unpronounceable, all were laid bare to a partner in the yage experience.

That the drug should have remained so perfect a secret for so many hundreds of years was not in the least surprising. Realizing what they possessed, and its potential for good and evil, its discoverers—the Kundalu—adopted a policy of isolationism utterly simple in execution: anyone they did not recognize was apprehended, and yage stuffed down his throat.

Then they either killed him or married him.

This delightfully uncomplicated system lasted until 1984. Inevitably, the Kundalu were discovered, by a real estate developer looking for a place to put 2,650 condominiums. Over twelve hundred years of self-knowledge on a level unknown to mankind at large had made the Kundalu wise and canny indeed—175 of the condominiums had been built and fifty-three sold before the clearing crews stumbled across the Kundalu village.

The strange and humble indians would not leave the land where holy yage grew, nor permit its razing.

They resisted the developer's half-hearted attempt to learn their vestigial spoken language, lest the secret of its growth be somehow wrested from them. He, in turn, was impatient—and out there in the bush, no sanctions could be applied to him—he was, after all, building *dwelling units*. He slaughtered the simple Kundalu to the last man.

It chanced that four of the crew assigned to demolish the primitively beautiful village of the Kundalu were welfare clients—counterculture types who recognized the ceremonial bowls of dried leaves they found for what they were: a communal drug. The foreman found them inside a structure like a decapitated dome, open to the skies but closed to the gaze of passers-by, and he understood enough of the joyous babbling he overhead to shoot all four of them dead.

In six months he and the developer had a small but established corporate identity in the underworld of big-time drug traffic. In a year, the developer had him killed. Within four years, the developer was outselling the quasilegal giant, Speed Inc. and was giving even the mammoth, completely legal International Marijuana Harvesters a pain in the balance sheet, despite the fact that Truth (as yage was brand-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

named) was still on the Illegal List.

The usual controversy flared in the news media, freighted with a larger than usual bulk of ignorance, for very little indeed was known about Truth Dope. In time the substance might completely overturn many time-honored concepts of personal privacy, many institutions of law and justice, many truisms of human psychology—but at present absolutely all that was known about it was that it was curiously resistant to chemical analysis, and that no more than three people could safely share the drug. The stressed of mingling identities with a larger number were severely unhinging; the ego tended to *get lost*, and the secret of finding it again had died with the Kundalu. Before that had been proven to the counterculture's cynical satisfaction, many communes ended in gibbering insanity.

Nor did many triads flourish. By its nature Truth became a couples' drug. Thus:

Solomon and Barbara sat naked in the rear of the Mome, facing each other in lotus. The windows were opagued, the roof transparent; the mobile home was open to the skies but closed to the gaze of passer-by.

"Should we smoke?"

Sol considered this at length, shrugged. "I don't see why not. The parts to be opened go deeper than pot can reach. Maybe it'll relax us. This is going to be a little scary."

Barbara caught his nervousness, mulled it over carefully. "Sol. . .you're really jumpy about this, aren't you?" A flash of insight: "You've done Truth before, haven't you?"

"Why ask? You'll know for yourself in a little while."

"Sol. . .Sol, maybe you're right. We don't have to rush into this. I don't. . ."

"You don't want to know?" Sol burst out. "After all the pleading and convincing you're scared of the Truth? Oh, no! Have a few tokes and then we'll get to it. I'm not going to call this off now, and then wait to see how long it is before you want to know again, before you start hinting and then urging and then demanding. No way, mama. We're doing Truth today."

Barbara lowered her eyes, and busied herself searching for the Grassmasters. She found a crumpled pack on the right-hand service shelf over the bed and passed them to him. Current social etiquette required the woman to wave the joint alight, but Solomon had chosen to smoke GMs specifically because they did not have ignotips, and had to be lit by hand. He enjoyed the archaic ritual of striking fire with his hands and placing it where it was needed, and spent a not insignificant portion of his income on the hard-to-find matches. Now



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than ever, she sensed, he would want that feeling of control.

He accepted the marijuana impassively, producing a box of wooden matches from the pocket of the tunic which lay beside him on the bed. By his other side lay the ancient, hand-made Gibson J-45 which was his comfort and sometimes his voice, and Solomon struck a match along the silk-and-steel A string with a quick snap of his wrist. Echoes of whispering giants overflowed the sounding-box, and Solomon sucked flame through the filtertip joint with a sharp urgency.

He passed the joint to Barbara, cupping it protectively in his hand. Reaching to take it, she was struck for the first time by how much in him was conservative, if not reactionary. His independent thinking had struck her until now only as an evidence of the creativity she admired and loved in him; all at once she realized how much of him yearned for an earlier age. He cupped the joint as if wary of detection—yet pot had been legalized long before his instincts were trained. He played an acoustic guitar in an electronic age—certainly it sounded mellower than contemporayr instruments, but mostly it was *older*. In a dozen innocent mannerisms she detected for the first time an undercurrent of yearning for the uncomplicated past, when men still controlled their destiny. *If I keep pulling insights like this*, she thought, gulping smoke, *I won't need Truth.*

And it was true. Expecting imminent truth, her mind was revving up, extending the sensitivity threshold of its own built-in truth detectors, trying to approach both drug and experience as honestly and openly as possible.

She passed the joint back to Solomon, who took it impassively, emptying his lungs for a second hit. He would not meet her eyes.

She watched his bare chest fill as he drew on the smouldering cigarette, and became unaccountably aware of the weight of her own breasts. She looked down at them, and it was only when she observed that her nipples were swollen that she remembered that before the night was out, Solomon's impotence should be over at last. In a vivid flash of memory she saw again the look of his eyes when orgasm took him, and she shivered.

"Barb."

She looked up. He was holding out the joint, breath held tightly. Brushing hair from her eyes with a vague hand, she took the joint, which was burned down close to the filter.

She inhaled sharply.

Very suddenly, the air began to sparkle, and a gentle buzzing filled her head. "Whoops, I'm stoned," she said and giggled, taking another puff.

"Say, you must have been smoking some of that there



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

merry-wanna," Solomon said gravely.

"Well of course, ye damn fool," she crowed, spraying smoke. "How else would I get stoned?" They roared with laughter.

Sol retrieved the joint from her relaxing fingers and stubbed it out in an ashtray. Still giggling, he slid open a sliding panel in the wall, removed an Oriental figurine:. a carven dragon with sparkling eyes. He touched it under one wing, and its mouth opened wide. Prisoned in its lower fangs was a blue capsule.

Solomon tilted the dragon. It spat the capsule onto his upturned palm.

Barbara stopped giggling. "Oh," she said. "Yes."

Solomon met her eyes. "Yes."

He made a long arm, pulled open the refrigerator, and removed a plastic flask, red with white logo. "Better take this with soda," he said judiciously. "Taken stuff tastes worse'n peyote."

*He could have read that in a magazine,* she thought.

He put the flask of Coke on the bed between them, shifting his weight carefully to avoid spilling it. He dried his sweaty left hand on his thighs and broke the capsule open onto his palm. It made a powdery pile of grey veined with green, fine-grained and dry. He held out his hand.

Barbara reached, gingerly bisected the pile with her thumb-


## OCEAN LIVING–THE NEW FRONTIER

**The Ocean Living Institute has been formed to conduct and promote research in oceanography and independent self-sufficient forms of community living on the ocean. It will encourage individuals and business firms to form investment groups to fund construction and operation of ocean based industries, serve as a clearinghouse for ocean living contacts, publish information on legal and other aspects of oceanic settlement, publish information on new concepts in oceanography, aquaculture, and oceanic settlement, and conduct tests on new concepts and devices.**

**The institute is a nonprofit corporation and contributions of cash and supplies are deductible for federal income tax purposes. The institute is in the formative stages, and is especially interested in hearing from people who can help to develop it.**

**Further information is available from, and contributions should be sent to:**

**OCEAN LIVING INSTITUTE**
**23 River Road**
**North Arlington,**
**New Jersey 07032**




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nail, sweeping the two portions far apart. Looking up at him one last time, she bent close, licked one of the two doses from his hand, and grabbed for the Coke. She made a face. "Oooooh!"

He nodded gently as she gulped Coke, then took the flask from her. Eyes on the remaining powder, he licked and gulped Coke in almost the same motion. When he had swallowed, he put down the flask, wiped his hands on the bedspread and took her hands in his.

"Okay, mama," he said with great tenderness, suddenly vulnerable. "Here we go."

MCGINNE CAME howling out of sleep, flailing wildly with leaden arms.

"Goddam skull-face kid," he shouted, and then fell back exhausted, drenched in sour sweat. Coherence came slowly to his thoughts, and he was torn by an unbearable craving for a cigarette. He tried to masturbate, and could not.

He rolled finally from the bed, padded to the bookviewer and selected a book at random, falling heavily into the chair. He stared at the displayed title page for a few moments, reached out to punch for the next page and slapped the set off instead. He buried his face in his hands and wept.

Nerves stretched wire-tight, he shook with racking sobs. He dug his knuckesl into his eyes, but could not banish the haunting, palpable vision of Annie beside him on her bed, naked and vulnerable, cringing under his wrath (his baby planted now in her belly). He ground the heels of his hands against his ears, but could not banish the sound of her tears as she begged him for emotional support ("You *said* you were going to divorce her. Mack, I need you with me on this—it's *our baby*."). He beat at his skull with his clenched fists, but he could not deny the memory of his decision to "borrow" enough money from his company to leave town, going underground and leaving the whole impossible tangle of his life behind.

And above all, he could not shut out the voice of the blonde kid with the incongruous hat, could not seal the holes that soft voice blasted through McGinny's carefully-wrought fortress of rationalization. When the mind refuses to face truth, it very often knows what it is doing: a high truth-level is only tolerable to saints and those sinners who, loving themselves, have learned how to forgive themselves. But McGinny no longer had any choice.

For the kid never attacked in any overt way, never quite gave him a justification for his helpless rage. He just. . .asked questions,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and McGinny could not keep the answers from leaping unbidden to his mind.

Nor could he forget them now. The jailer's soft voice, hideously amplified, seemed to fill the cell, as it had for days now.

"Well I don't know, Mr McGinny. You say that security and prestige were your goals, but doesn't it seem like you already had them both? And yet you weren't satisfied. . ."

"So then you're saying sex is kind of like a power trip for you, aren't you?"

"Well, why didn't your father divorce her then? I would have."

"Then Annie's probably having a pretty rough time of it now?"

"I get it. You were afraid to leave Alice. . .No?"

"But Isn't that just a fancy way of saying. . .?"

."but you just said. . ."

But didn't you just. . . ?"

"But I thought. . ."

"But. . ."

McGinny burst from the chair with an animal howl and swept the desk clean of paper with clawed hands, swinging his arms wide and scattering sheets in all directions. "I'll kill you," he shrieked, and tore at his hair.

He lurched around the cell, kicking and punching at the unyielding fixtures, slamming his shoulder into the wall with whimpered oaths. He beat on the surface of the quadio, snapping off both controls, and the machine roared into life. Shorted somewhere within, it picked its own tape, at peak volume. The selection was old, stereophonic, activating the rear speakers only—it balanced perfectly. The earsplitting voice of Leon Russell plaintively asked:

*Are we really happy*
*with this lonely*
*game we play?*
*Searching for*
*words to say*
*Searching but not finding*
*understanding anyway*
*We're lost*
*in this masquerade.*

McGinny staggered, his hands over his ears. He could not shut out the song. He lay down on his back and smashed at the quadio with his bare heels, and it went dead with one last shriek.

As he lay panting on the floor, his ears still ringing, he opened his eyes to see the kid watching him from the door window.

McGinny began to sweat profusely. He struggled to his feet and looked wildly around the room. *Rubber silverware, paper sheets, no razor, GO AWAY, KID!*

"Say, did I near noise just now? Kinda late to play the quadio, isn't it, Mr. McGinny? Oh, I bet I know. You got to missing Alice and the kids, didn't you, Mr. McGinny?

"Hey, Mr. McGinny! What are you. . .*hey*!



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh holy shit.

"Oh wow."

The kid's face pressed closer.

THE DRUG CAME ON very slowly at first.

For what seemed like hours, Barbara felt only a gradual numbing of her extremities, a slow falling-off of communication with the nerves and muscles of her limbs. She and Solomon gazed deep into each other's eyes, motionless in lotus. She yearned to let her gaze travel downward over his body, but she maintained eye contact tenaciously, as though afraid of opening a circuit that was being built between them.

Very suddenly she was blind. Almost immediately, all tactile sensation vanished from her body. Adrift in crackling black, she could no longer see or touch anything in any direction. Although she had learned enough from friends and media reports to be expecting this, it still took her by surprise. She yelped.

As from a great distance, she heard Solomon's voice reassuring her, needlessly explaining that they were only experiencing a repression of distractions, that it was only a drug which would wear off, the standard litany of calming things that are said to one who might be freaking out. The truly extraordinary thing was that the voice changed as it spoke from stereo the monaural, converging inside her skull, as though she had switched from speakers to headphones.

"It's okay, Sol, I'm all right," she assured him, and then realized that she had not spoken aloud. She tried to and could not.

They drifted for awhile in silence, then. And as they drifted, sparkling darkness everywhere, each became aware of a growing *presence*, for which no words or symbols existed, which their minds could not grasp but only see/feel/taste. Barbara concentrated as hard as she could on the complex abstract which was Solomon Orechal's identity in her mind; received no familiar echo.

*Of course*, she thought, *of course he sees himself differently than I do*. She waited patiently for her mind to construct a suitable analogy for the identity-waves she was beginning to receive, and wondered what *he* was seeing. *Soon I'll know.*

The darkness coalesced, lightened perceptibly. An image began to take form, seen simultaneously from all angles.

It was a smooth iridium sphere.

It gleamed before her in the swirling dark, self-contained and apparently impenetrable. Her heart began to beat faster, a bass drum miles below her.

As she watched, spellbound, she saw the polished surface of the sphere begin to discolor, to tarnish. Portions of its surface



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

began to bubble and flake away, as though the metallic sphere were immersed in a clear acid that was slowly oxidizing it away. A high, sharp whining became audible, a sound of reluctant disintegration.

The image disturbed and frightened Barbara. She sensed an uncontrollable power latent in the sphere, ready to burst it asunder when it was sufficiently weakened. Girlfriends had tried to tell her of their experiences with Truth, but the closest Barbara had heard to this was a woman who said she initially perceived her partner as a man in full medieval armor, visor down. Unsettled, Barbara found that she was employing a pressure she could not define, in a manner she could not describe, against the sphere she could not understand.

*Whatever it is,* she screamed silently, *let it end now. It's been too long already.*

Time stood still, and she slipped into a new plane of understanding, intuition refined into knowledge. She perceived all at once that the walls of the sphere drew strength in some way from the marijuana Solomon had smoked—and that he had known they would.

*He lied,* came the thought.

And at that, the sphere crumbled like a sugar easter egg in a glass of boiling water.

Parts of that explosion of data she forgot as soon as she perceived them. Parts of it she could carry with her to the end of her days. Some things simply could not be forced into words, some translated as paragraphs, some as single words or impressions coded only to subvocalized grunts or wordless cries. Alone in the darkness that crackled and roared she recoiled, struggling to reduce the enormous input to something comprehensible, pursued by howling fragmentary echoes of forgotten thoughts and memories.

*. . . thinks he's so smart, I'll break his. . . . . nobody knows but me. . . . . .so alone like this, I. . . . . don't look. . . . . things on so I could squint in the mirror and see what a lady looked like in her. . . . . don't look in. . . . . I didn't mean to. . . . . won't let me, just bec. . . . . it wasn't cheating exactly, it was. . . . . don't l. . . . so pretty, I wonder what her. . . . don't. . . . . how could she do this to me after all we. . . . . holy shit it squirted all over my. . . . . If only I. . . . . don't look insi. . . . . what's he doing to Mother? . . . . .don't I. . . . . .I*

Shaken to her roots, she reeled but held on, too terrified to let go. There was something beneath, something hidden, something that made alarms go off all over her subconscious. And as well as something hidden, there was something missing, and she knew



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intuitively that they were connected. *What's missing?* she screamed toward the place where she had once supposed God to *be. What is wrong?* The onslaught continued, keeping her off-balance.

*Gawd you give a pain in the ass Janice, you real. . . . think I got away with it this ti. . . . got to get a B this term of Old Karkhead'll. . . . don't loo. . . . God the Father Almighty Who. . she suspects. . . . . other kids get a bike so why can't. . . . . red like blood. . . . . be good, God, I'll be. . . . . don't look insi. . . . . n't you understand I've got to be the master in my own. . . . . why you. . . . . don't look. . . . seen a. . . sunset. . . . . like. . . . that before. . . . hairy black spider that. . . . . so alone and they. . . . . don't look inside. . . . . DON'T LOOK INSIDE!. . . . . .*

Inside! With a sinking feeling of terror and despair Barbara yanked her attention from the chaotic distracting turmoil that the sphere had held, and turned it inward. She found only the confusion of her own thoughts.

She was alone inside her skull.

Where was Solomon? Why was he not probing *her* consciousness, as deep within her identity as she was in his?

Frantic now, she reached back out to the welter of tangled thoughts and forgotten memories emanating from her lover, and. . . . *swept* at it, in a manner impossible to describe. The roar of swarming images died as though she had struck a suppressor switch, and she saw several things very clearly.

She saw that Solomon had palmed most of his share of the drug.

She saw his consciousness, trembling, crouched, incoherent with terror.

She saw at last that which he had sought most to hide: that the feeling he professed to have for her was non-existent, a cover for his real motivations.

She saw his true reason for clinging to her: a paralyzing fear of being, in history's most crowded era, intolerably alone.

She saw that her man had never confronted her identity as an individual, never allowed himself to perceive her as a person, as anything but a palliative for hideous loneliness. Nor anyone else in his life.

She saw that he was afraid to confront her identity, to accept the guilt he knew he bore for using another human being as a tool, a teddy-bear, a living fetish with which to ward off demons of solitude.

She saw the indifference with which he regarded her own hopes and needs and fears, saw the relentless guilt which made him despise himself for it.

She saw the desperation in



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which he had sought to hide the truth from them both by reducing his dosage of yage and distorting both their synaptic responses with pot.

Conprehension and compassion washed over her as a single wave, a wave of pity and love for this tormented man to whom she had given her heart, and she cried out in her mind: *it's all right, Sol, it's ALL RIGHT! Don't be afraid, please. I love you.*

Undrugged, her heard her not.

She saw swimming to the surface of his mind a surreal cartoon figure of herself, choked with revulsion, recoiling from the selfishness of his love, face contorted with bitter rejection. *No!* she screamed silently, but she knew he could not hear, knew she could not make him hear, and knew with astonished horror that he was snapping, could no longer bear the crushing pain of the guilt he could not forget; and she realized with a nauseating certainty what he was going to do.

The throbbing undercurrent of fragmented voices swelled to a shuddering roar in her skull, and now each of those voices was only a throaty growl.

She screamed once, and then many times.

THE HISSING of the torch reverberated in the bare corridor with an acoustic sibilance that was unpleasant if you listened to it. Jerry and Vito had learned not to listen to it.

"Ain't had this thing out of the shop in so long, I feel like I oughta take it for a walk," Jerry said, adjusting the oxy mix.

"Yeah," grunted Vito from behind his opaque mask.

"Naw, we sure don't have to do this very often."

Vito grunted again.

"Wonder what made him do it. You know? Whole place like that to hisself, nobody to tell him when to go to work, when to go to sleep. Just lie around all day and think about fems, that's what I'd do."

"So get busted," Vito grumbled.

"Hey, bro. What's with you? You got a belly-ache or something?"

"Gimme the willies, that bird."

"Him? He ain't givin' nobody nothin'."

Vito grunted a third time, and Jerry shook his head, returning to his cutting. *Welfare check's due tonight,* he thought suddenly, and smiled behind the polarized mask that shielded his eyes from the arc of the tortl.

Noises came from the distance, approaching. Hastily, Vito stubbed out a Gold and tucked the roach in his shirt pocket.

The warden came into view around the corner, followed by two long-haired guards. He swept past Vito and Jerry without a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word, ignoring the torch, and peered into the window of the cell door.

"Mmmmmmm," he said. "Yes."

The two guards shifted their weight restlessly.

"All right," said the balding official. "All right. Obviously it's a suicide."

"Obviously," murmured one of the guards, a blonde, mustached youth. The warden glared at him irritably.

"Why wasn't I notified at once?"

"You were, sir," the guard said evenly. "Union regs say you only have to check 'em twice on night shift unless otherwise ordered. That's how I found him an hour ago. It was already too late to help him."

"Oh, very well, very well," the warden grumbled. "Carry on, you two." He went away, trailing the two guards. The blonde one was smiling faintly.

Jerry and Vito looked at each other, shrugged. Jerry realigned the still-snarling torch against the door, and Vito relit his joint.

"Sure is a good thing this old torch leaks so bad, or he'd have smelled that and taken your ass," Jerry grinned. Vito passed him the joint; he slid it behind his mask and toked quickly, before the smoke could accumulate and lace his eyes. After a time he left off tracing a nearly-complete, foot-and-a-half circle in the plasteel door, and paused. Giggling, he began to inscribe eyes and a broadly smiling mouth within the circle. Vito watched and smoked silently.

Again echoes sounded distantly. "Jesus," said Jerry. Vito glared at him and swallowed the joint. Hastily, Jerry completed the circle and began hammering at the disc he had cut, frantic to unseat it before his artwork was seen.

He was barely in time; even as the plug fell into the cell with a crash, two fat men came into view at the end of the corridor. One wore black and one wore grey. Both wore the same expression.

Jerry and Vito scrambled to their feet and backed away from the door, striving to look straight. The fat men came near simultaneously, entirely ignoring the two welfare workers.

The one in grey reached gingerly through the new hole in the cell door, pulled toward himself with a gloved hand. They both entered, walked a few paces inside, stopped.

"Not much either of us can do here, is there, Doctor?"

"It seems not, Father."

"Well, then. . . . ."

"Yes."

They emerged, began to walk away.

"Hey," Jerry yelped.

The physician turned. "Yes?"

"Wh. . .what do we do with. . . .?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The fat grey man paused, thought for a moment. "Unlock the infirmary and put him in there somewhere. I'll have a vehicle sent." He and the priest left, talking about chess.

Jerry looked at Vito, who gave him a very black look. He knelt and extinguished the torch, and silence fell in the corridor.

They went inside:

"Jeez," Vito breathed softly. It sounded like a prayer.

The two-inch-thick plug was lying just inside the doorway, its imbecile smile upside down. Beyond it lay McGinny, on his back, a feral and bloody grin on his face. His wrists had been chewed open.

"Jeez," Vito said again, and began putting on his gloves.

SOLOMON ORECHAL sat in his chair and surveyed the room which was to be his home for the next twenty-to-life-depending. With a disgusted sigh he picked his J-45 from the bed, hit a G, tuned, hit an E, tuned, hit an E again. Satisfied, he modulated through D back into G, added a seventh.

*"This time next year,"* he sang, and stopped.

After a while he sang "Pack Up Your Sorrows," and that was all right, but when he had finished he found himself wondering who he could give all *his* sorrows to, so he went right into Lightning's "Prison Blues," and managed to get off on that.

But before long, inevitably, he was playing the song he used to close every set, the one he hadn't wanted to play here, now. He was halfway into James Taylor's "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight," when he saw the face at the cell window, blonde mustache under a blue uniform hat. He leaped from the chair, tossing his pride-and-joy heedlessly toward the bed, and sprang to the window.

"HEY OUT THERE, can you hear me?" he shouted.

"Hey man, be measured," came a soft voice, electronically muffled. "I can hear you heavy."

"Wow, listen," Solomon babbled, "you work here, man? Or what? Hey listen, *you want to hear a song*? You got a minute?"

"Sure, bro, sure. Take it easy."

Solomon ran back to the bed, picked up his axe and threw the strap over his head. He began frantically patting his pockets for a flat-pick, discovered he held one in his hand.

"What are you in for?" the blonde guard asked quietly.

"Huh? Me? Oh, uh. . . . . rape," Solomon said, gripping the pick. ". . .and murder," he added, and looked down, hitting a very intricate chord.

The blonde jailer's eyes lit up, and he tugged at his mustache. ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Among the characteristics by which life can be recognized are ingestion, excretion, irritability, tenacity. . .*

# TREE OF LIFE

PHYLLIS EISENSTEIN



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT WAS A YOUNG TREE, as trees go, planted from seed in the days preceding urban sprawl. Its cultivator, an elderly man with an inordinate and uncommercial fondness for berries, owned a hundred acres of foliage adorned with black and purple and red morsels of sweetness. He lived in a rambling manse of a style too southern for the local climate; thus he succumbed to pneumonia before the seedling bore its first fruit. For a time, rabbits and squirrels feasted on his bequest; the tree, mature at last, showered its bounty in the weeds for their sole benefit. But, inevitably, civilization arrived. A contractor annexed the land for his latest subdivision, and the vines and brambles were mashed under tractor treads, drowned in fresh topsoil, buried beneath concrete. The trees, too—the old oaks, the hickories, the elm—were all cut down for standing in the wrong places . . . all but the berry tree, which the bulldozers had somehow missed. The contractor decided to leave it there, at the edge of one of the newly-formed, ungreen yards—he thought it gave the property character. He resolved to charge an extra five hundred dollars for it.

Harry and Marlene bought that house, and they laid out a flagstone patio in the shade of the tree. It was March, and the branches were still bare.

THE SHIP TUMBLED about him, its gravitors demolished. Nutrient fluid from the suspension-tank foamed over the controls, but he didn't worry about that—they were too disrupted to suffer further harm. He fought tenaciously to maintain the tender host-body's life-functions, to preserve the faint spark that flickered through its neural web. Yet all his hyperorganic power was insufficient; his host's senses dimmed, its pulse diminished, it manipulators ceased to respond. Additional emergency procedures were futile; he contracted into the ultimate shelter of the central body cavity.

Despair descended, a despair he had never known before. He might survive the crash, but unless he obtained a new host immediately, his dessication in raw atmosphere would follow with relentless speed.

The prospect of such a fate disturbed him little, though it was a particularly grisly sort of end, but the shocking reality of his personal failure brought him to the brink of catatonic dysfunction. He was shamed, and his own unspecialized tissues revolted against his shame, secreting painful acid enzymes throughout his amorphous, slightly alkaline body. He had misjudged the strength of the deadly sphere of radiation enveloping this siren world of blue seas and white clouds.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was only just that he should pay for his failure with his life—he resigned himself to that—but his duty lay in warning his comrades of that danger, and the abstract imperative of duty demanded that he survive long enough to accomplish it.

A violent concussion shuddered through the cabin as the craft slammed into the densest layer of atmosphere. Deceleration hurled his ruined life-support system against the view-screen. Helpless and on the edge of utter withdrawal, he dreamed, lapsing into shock as the crash plastered his protoplasm against the bulkheads. He dreamed still—though he was scarcely one agonized molecule thick—while the ship collapsed about him; dreamed of a lazy future after the struggle for race survival had ended in victory.

When his feeble, unaided senses returned, he found himself entombed in glowing metal. His ship was smashed and fused beyond recognition, his host pulverized and charred, but his own resilient fibers, or thirty percent of them—enough—survived. He dragged himself away from the heat, out into the alien air. He sensed a large life-form nearby, and some hidden reserve of strength propelled him toward it. It made no attempt to escape but accepted him docilely; he entered easily through a scratch in its outer covering. Methodically, he extended filaments of his substance throughout its vascular system, feeding reflexively as he went.

He slept. . .

"I'M SO GLAD we bought this house, Harry. The mulberry tree really makes a difference."

Harry shrugged. His wife had mouthed that same line so many times before that he had developed a conditioned reflex. The tree was her idea. He was more interested in the sod that he had purchased at vast expense and which was slowly but steadily turning brown under his ministrations.

"Look—tiny berries I thought they were caterpillars, they're so white and bumpy looking. Frieda says they're very tasty when they're ripe."

Harry eyed the tree noncommittally. Berries did not excite him.

"I guess we shouldn't spray it if we're going to eat them, but look at the poor leaves. They're all chewed up. Aren't there bugs you can buy that will eat the bugs that eat the leaves?"

"I don't know." Harry had lived in a fifth floor walk-up as a child and in a three hundred unit high-rise as a young adult. Not only the tree, but the whole suburban bit was his wife's idea.

"I think I'll ask the man at the nursery."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ask him about the grass, too."

CATATONIA FAILED to claim him, but he was semi-torpid for a long time, regenerating and regaining his old strength. Eventually, intellection superseded instinct; he surveyed his savior with critical intensity. From its size and sturdiness, he judged it to be a mature individual, a member of a slow-growing, long-lived species—a durable haven in which to contemplate his future. But the lack of sensory apparatus was disconcerting. Vision, in particular, would have been of use; he had become accustomed to vision in his former host and felt disoriented without it. Manipulation, too, was absent, and locomotion, but he was not immediately concerned; many creatures went through stages of free-living interspersed with immobility. It was possible that other senses would appear later in the life-cycle. He was prepared to wait.

He strained upward, experiencing heliotropism and photosynthesis.

"WILL YOU SWEEP those goddam berries off the patio, Marlene?"

"More will fall as soon as I'm done."

"I can't stand it; they squish and stain my shoes, they're all over the lawn chairs, and I'm tracking them into the house."

"Stand on the grass."

"They're in the goddam grass, too! Every time I mow the lawn, I get sprayed with berry juice."

"Well, Marlene replied, if you'd pick them all, there wouldn't be any left to fall."

"I don't have time to pick berries. I come home tired and want to relax, not climb around in some tree, getting full of berry juice. Why don't you pick them?"

"You're the one it bothers."

"Yeah, but you're home all day."

"I've got enough to do to take up all my free time. Besides, we need a longer ladder to get the ones near the top. If you *ate* the berries, I might be persuaded to pick them."

"You eat them."

"I've had enough."

"Then give them away."

"I don't feel like playing migrant worker just to feed the neighbors, thank you."

"Well, I'm going inside!" He stormed away from the patio, and his foot slipped on an over-ripe berry or two that lay in the grass, causing him to perform back-wrenching contortions in order to avoid falling. The doctor diagnosed a slipped disc and prescribed a month in traction.

HE KNEW HEAT and cold and the loss of minor tissues. As water crystallized around his host's uppermost appendages and piled in



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drifts around its central support, it lapsed into dormancy. He withdrew to its lowest extremities, where life lingered, digging deep into solid matter in search of nutrients.

He began to fear that the individual he occupied was one which died in the coldest season. If so, he was as doomed as when his ship crashed. He could not leave a host while it was alive, yet if none of those small mobile creatures which abounded in warmer times was near enough for transfer when this host perished, he was lost.

He worried unnecessarily. As temperatures rose, he flowed upward with his host's sap and swam in chlorophyll.

"THE SAME GODDAM THING every year," said Harry. "The goddam tree must pollinate itself."

"The man at the nursery said it was wind-pollinated."

"If people did that, we'd be knee-deep in babies by now!"

"Calm down, Harry."

"If I could, I'd pick every goddam flower off that goddam tree. Then there wouldn't be any goddam berries."

"They're catkins, not flowers."

"Shut up, Marlene. I'm gonna chop it down."

He wasn't too familiar with axes but the doctor said it wasn't a dangerous gash.

HE FELT HIS HOST in pain. It was a slow kind of pain, slowly perceived and slowly reacted to, but pain nonetheless. He flowed toward the injury, sent tiny tendrils of himself to investigate it. To his previous host, it would have been fatal; the circulatory system was almost severed, the central support dangerously weakened. But the new host was hardy, and when its slow suffering had faded, it blossomed as before.

He was not entirely pleased by this. He had come to realize that his host was long-lived but permanently stationary. It had saved his life, but it was otherwise useless; he required locomotion, at least, for the consummation of his plans. He had to transfer from host to host until he lodged in a member of the dominant species of the planet, which he knew from his studies was technologically advanced enough for his purposes. But until his present host died, he could not transfer, not even to one of the small mobile creatures that scrambled about him more and more often as the weather warmed. So he waited. Cycle after cycle passed, and his host survived—and lacking organs of manipulation or locomotion it could not even be forced to kill itself.

Sooner or later, his people would come to this planet, and the faulty information he had sent



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them would mean their destruction.

GET DOWN FROM THERE! Marlene, why do you let these kids climb in that tree? It's too dangerous."

"Oh, Harry, leave them alone. They aren't climbing very high."

"Get out of that tree! Goddamit, you're full of berry juice. Get into the house."

"Harry, be careful with that thing. You know how unmechanical you are."

"Don't worry about it. I know what I'm doing this time." Methodically and with great satisfaction, he began to cut off the smaller branches. The power saw vibrated pleasantly in his fingers.

"How much are you going to prune?" asked Marlene.

"All of it, twig by twig."

HE FELT HIS HOST being dismembered, and he withdrew to the lower extremities, where the major portion of his flesh had always rested. Not quickly enough, though—a filament of himself was caught and sliced off. He shrank, pooling deep within the host, and nursed the raw edge. Vibration shook him, and he knew from his host's reaction that the damage was intensifying. If only he knew what appendages were being removed, he could concentrate his whole body in one of them and be removed with that limb, which would then undoubtedly die and free him.

The agent of destruction, he knew with his own unaided senses, was alive, and the random way in which it chose to work first on one side of his host and then another betrayed its mobility. He felt confident that it possessed vision, too, for its use of the metal cutting tool was precise and swift. The randomness, however, stymied him. Where to go and how far?

He waited, holding his body as compact as possible, hoping he would be removed in one piece; he would have given another slice of himself for vision.

"After it's seasoned, we can burn it in the fireplace," Harry said triumphantly. "Wood is damn expensive these days."

"What about the trunk?"

"Forget it. I'm tired. Paint it blue and use it as a chair."

HIS HOST LIVED slowly and died slowly. Deep among its lowest extremities, cells divided and reached for moisture, but above, it was inert. He waited, impatient now, for he often sensed the warmth of other life touching his host.

Cells divided and fed, and he remained.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE IT sprouted. On your mother's street, dozens



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of trees were cut down, and their trunks never sprouted."

"They died of Dutch elm disease, Harry. The city cut them down so they wouldn't fall on anybody."

"Can we give this thing Dutch elm disease?"

"I don't think a mulberry tree can catch it."

"We've got to get rid of it."

"Harry, you promised you'd panel the rumpus room this summer."

THE TENACITY of his host overwhelmed him. If only it were mobile he would have no complaints. Here was another danger to warn his people against; he only wished someone had warned *him*!

"I KNEW IF I let it go this year the damn thing would have berries. How do they grow so *fast*? And now it's a bush instead of a tree, and the roots are cracking the patio. Why didn't you nag me to finish the job, Marlene?"

"How about weed-killer, Harry?"

"I don't want to kill the grass. I'll dig it up."

"Harry, the man at the nursery said those roots grow deep."

"So, I'll dig you a swimming pool while I'm at it! Leave me alone. This is between me and this goddam mulberry tree."

HE FELT SOMETHING worrying at his host's lowest extremities. They were being exposed to air. A mobile creature was clearing the solid matter away; he could feel the pressure of its soft flesh against his host's substance. He contracted upward, away from the source of disturbance, realizing with satisfaction that his host was being detached from the life-giving nourishment below.

He had already chosen his next host: the creature that killed his present one.

Perhaps it was not too late.

"YOU CAN'T BURN that in the fireplace, Harry. It's too big."

"I'll saw it up."

"But it's full of dirt."

"I'll wash it with the hose.

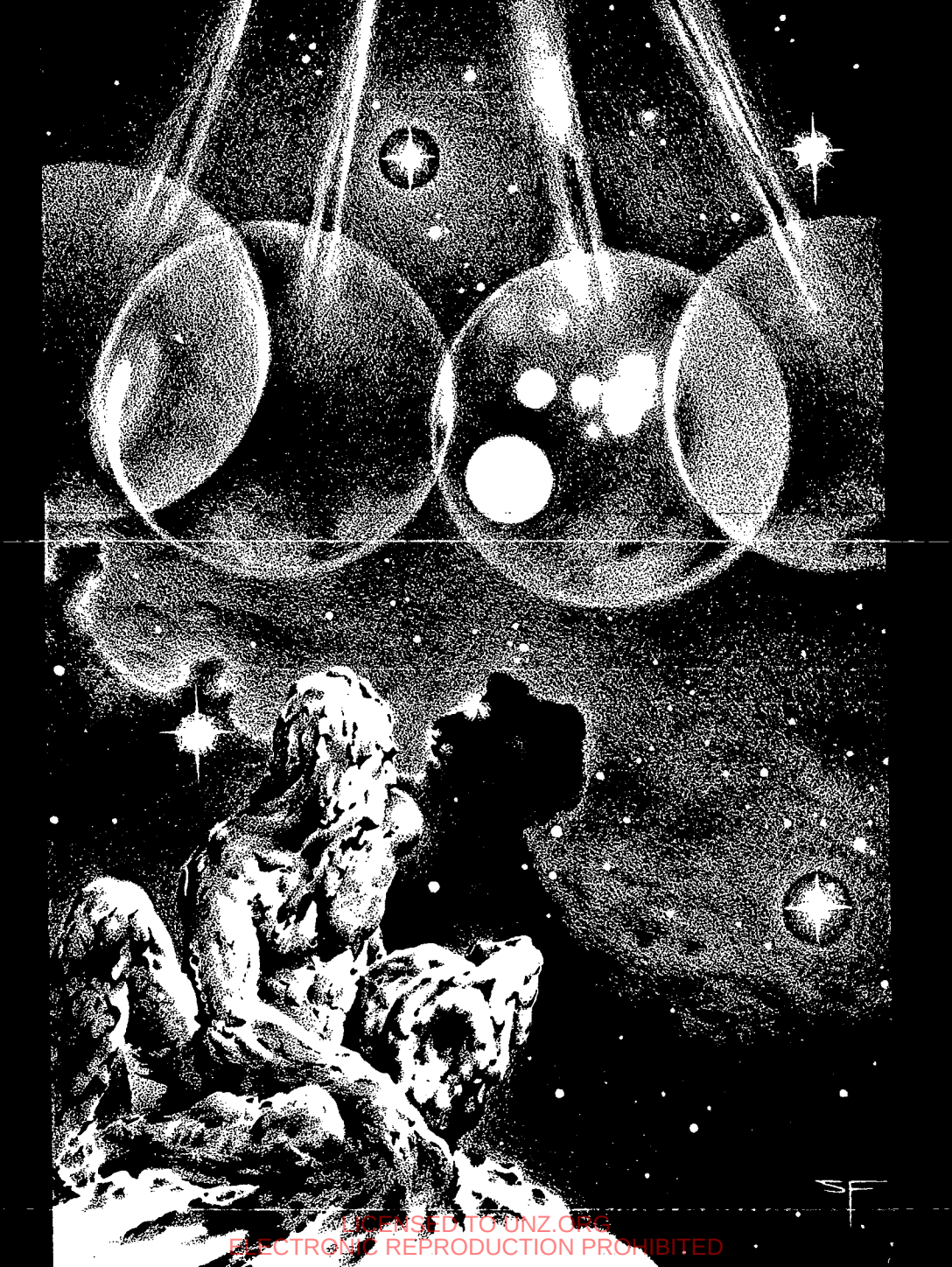
"Oh, Harry. it'll never dry; it'll just rot."

"Goddamit, then I'll haul it to the dump!"

AMONG THE RUSTLESS aluminum cans, the soggy, used paper products the putrefying garbage his host rested. Once a month a tractor came along and shoved some soil on top of the mound. Rich, nutrient-laden soil. The slowly-dying tree thrust out rootlets, thrust up green shoots, and was dying no more. In time, it bore fruit. It was a young tree, as trees go, with the tenacity common to all vegetation, and it had a long, long life ahead of it. ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# GALAXY BOOKSHELF

*Theodore Sturgeon*

A MALZBERG festival for those of you who, like me, are Malzberg addicts: *Guernica Night* (New York, Bobbs-Merril, 146 pp., $6.95), a novel, and *Out from Ganymede* (New York, Warner Paperback Library, 160 pp., $1.25), a collection of short stories.

Barry N. Malzberg is a true phenomenon: prolific, iconoclastic, bitter, angry, hilarious, and utterly self-directed. *Guernica Night*, a short novel together with a most perspicacious Appreciation by Jeff Clark and some introductory remarks by his friend and sometime editor Roger Elwood, is a most unsettling book. The basic theme is suicide: what am I doing here, and really, who should I? . . . cast in a near future in which instantaneous transportation is available to all me, and in which governmental policy is to prohibit, or at least inhibit, the population from taking the Final Trip. How much of Malzberg's narrative is metaphor and how much is narrative is in the eye of the beholder. In some sequences he is in violent confrontation with people who are not there at all; in other, despite the dreamlike quality of the prose, the other guy is indeed there and when struck, bleeds. It's the kind of book which keeps gnawing away at you after you put it down. It isn't an easy book to read, to review, or to think about afterword. I can't predict where you will wind up when you read it, but—try it.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOING FROM Malzberg to *A Place Beyond Man*, by Cary Neeper (New York, Scribner's, 400 pp., $7.95) is like going from sauna to snowbank. The beautiful microbiologist Tandra Grey, together with her adopted two-year-old daughter, are whisked away to a base on the other side of the Moon which is occupied by two species, the ellls (yes, friend printer: three l's), who are happy quasi-amphibians, totally involved with their senses; and varoks, austere, taciturn, and cerebral. In the course of the narrative, Tandra becomes an interface between these two, to the ultimate benefit of all. Interesting comparisons are made between the history and cultures of the three species, and Tandra's convoluted approach to acceptance of love from the ellls and the gift of her own to the varoks is interestingly documented. And yet through it all the passion, the sex, the anguish, the anger, and all the other points on the emotional spectra through which Tandra passes, there is a cool and clinical detachment which the author seems not to be aware of, not to be able to eradicate. Human passions are not orderly, and this book is, every line. And everything is explained. Everything. If there is a single common denominator to really good characterization by really good writers, it lies in their discovery that with human and believably humanoid beings, you can't explain everything. If you try, you are shoving tiles around on a game board.

HARRY MARTINSON is a Nobel Laureate. This pleases me, because in my own secret world I long ago nominated him for this together with half my kingdom and the hand of my fairest daughter—not because of his most famous work, *Aniara*, which is science fiction of the highest order, nor because it sold forty thousand copies in hardback in spite of being a poem, nor because it was made into a fine opera, but because of one passage he wrote: *She wounds*

*She wounds you*
*as a rose*
*will wound,*
*Not always,*
*as expected,*
*with its thorn,*
*A rose*
*will always wound you*
*with its rose. . .*

ONE OF THE headiest adventures in reading I have had in a long while is *Worlds in Creation* (Henry Regnery, illustrated, with 8 pp of photographs, index, and bibliography, 232 pp., $7.95) Kenneth W. Gatland is a British scientist, President of the British Interplanetary Society, a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and the editor of *Spaceflight* magazine. His two years of solid effort on the book collided with other commitments and he was assisted in its completion by Derek Dempster, former test pilot and science writer. The Foreword is by astronomer Patrick Moore. The book was published in England with the title *The Frontiers of Knowledge*, which I think is much more apt, because the book concerns itself with the farthest reaches of that growing edge at which sci-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ence begins to involve itself with mysticism and religion and philosophy—with which, at base, science has never had any serious quarrel. Much of the book will seem, to this audience, a review of things long known—the origin of the universe, the solar system, the planets; the nature of evolution, and so on. Regard it as just that—review—the back-pacing one does before the forward sprint to a great leap. Gatland's plunge into the areas of mysticism and religion is bold indeed, and the basic statement of the book is that our ancestor is the Universe itself, and the future, into which we have barely poked our noses, is the vast bulk of our history. So shrill (and of course, so justified) are the cries of doom these days that a book which holds so high a hope for us comes as almost a shock, and what comes with it, a resurgence of that sense of wonder which got us all into this mountain of marvels, science fiction, in the first place.

AND NOW, *now*, I can get into what I have been wanting to do for weeks, what I have been getting other things out of the way for, what I have, at the same time, ignored duties and rituals, my wife, my child, my rabbits and my dog. And now I hardly know where to begin.

How about this: I have just read the very best ever to come out of the science fiction field.

How about that.

Or I could start like this: *Dhalgren*, by Samuel R. Delany (New York, Bantam, 896 pp., $1.95) is the all-time Best Buy.

There are so many things to be said about this astonishing achievement that it would take many more than 896 pages to cover them all, and I make the flat prediction that criticism and commentary on *Dhalgren* will exceed that page-count very many times over. Further (and I think one must read the book before thoroughly appreciating this point) the urge to comment evokes an instant fury of frustration because of the necessity of putting down words in a linear fashion while the pressure is to say it all at once on every one of the many levels in which the book itself communicates. Seat the greatest performer in the world on the bench of the world's most elaborate organ, facing the orchestral score of the most celebrated symphony ever composed, and then amputate nine of his fingers, and he will tell you about this kind of frustration. Nothing one can lucidly state about this book can emerge like anything but one-finger music. Delany calls for response in chords because he writes in chords.

Looking back over the immense experience of having read *Dhalgren*, one recalls certain crests and peaks: a strophe on rape, great crystalline stretches of poetry and about poetry, sex sequences so exquisitely delineated that dirt cannot adhere to their polish, and above all, the injection of atmosphere—all kinds of atmosphere, meteorolgical, ecological, aural, emotional, spiritual. And character! The Scorpions, ragged and deadly kid gangs armed with holographic projectors which surround them with huge,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brilliant, terrifying shapes; Mr. Newboy, whose profound literary criticism would not be amiss in William Carlos Williams or T.S. Elliot; frightened blonde June, the obsessive rappee, fifteen-year-old Denny, a depraved innocent who knew, perhaps, some things about love which could benefit us all, and Lanya, whom I love, whom I shall always love. There are dozens more, and perhaps the most memorable character of all is the city itself, Bellona. It is somewhere in the U.S., and has experienced an unnamed disaster; but it is more than that. Metaphorically it is "here"—any man's "here"—and unless you are very different from the rest of us, you will allow that from time to time "here" shifts and changes in remarkable ways while "here" shifts and changes in remarkable ways while "why" remains a mystery. In addition, the protagonist is never sure of his own name; that is to say, he spends a lot of this gigantic novel in not knowing who he is.

Do you know who you are?

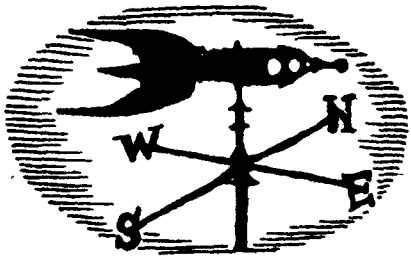
Have you noticed how often recently, in sf shorts and novels, this theme of transient or alternate reality occurs, and how it increases? For some rather fascinating reason which I must seek out some day, this looks like the trickle which will be a torrent in most literature in the near future. Who am I? What am I? Where am I, and what, really, is "here"? The natural pressure of growth and change, decay and rebirht, has always been in direct conflict with our hunger for stasis, solidity, permanence, security. It is in these areas in which Delany and other truly great, finished writers live and work; it is in these areas where live the wonders and astonishments, the surprises, the new learnings, the discoveries of things and processes hitherto unknown or (a very different thing) unrecognized.

The ultimate test of great and lasting literature is its usefulness. I have said it and said it: the big ones, from Homer through Shakespeare to Nabkov and Delaney, are fables, metaphors, parallels to your thought and actions and passions and mine. The usefulness of *Dahlgren* to you and to me is beyond question. Having experienced it, you will stand taller, understand more, and press your horizons back a little further away than you ever knew they could go.

I have space to say only one more thing about *Dahlgren*. It is a paperback original, and as such is going to be by-passed by serious critics everywhere. Some of us have been fighting this especially pernicious snobbery for a long time, with a certain but regrettably small amount of success. Rumor has it that a whole series of hardback houses turned this one down, until paperback release was the only course. I'll try to get the facts on this and will share them with you if I can, but in the meantime proclaim with me our gratitude to Bantam Books. The ultimate recogntion of *Dhalgren* as the literary landmark it truly is, as expressed in strong sales and wide acceptance, will do more to eliminate this snobbery than any amount of fulmination from this chair. ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




Dear Mr Baen:

I am confused! In past issues of *Galaxy* and *If*, there has been talk of the new sf. I've been reading both magazines for the past year. The writing field—part time—appeals to me. I find that both magazines keep me in touch with the present sf scene.

Anyway, the reason I'm confused is that I'm not sure what the new sf is. Are the recent stories in both magazines the new sf? I would appreciate your expert definition.

Your faithful mag. reader,
Bruce Rea

5025 Saratoga
Eugene, Oregon 97405

*Beats me.*

Dear Mr. Baen;

It's now two issues almost! in a row you've had something I ought to thank you for, and I couldn't hold myself back. But first:

One: I'm tremendously pleased with your editorship. Until you took over, my husband and I had pretty much dropped *If* & *Galaxy* from our reading. Now (this year) we've come back.

Two: My sympathies about *If's* suspension. I hope everything eases up quickly so we can enjoy it again.

Now to the meat of the letter.

I'm awfully glad Mr. Sturgeon inserted the comments on rare blood. I never knew mine was anything out of the ordinary, and even though it's the commonest rare, the information was definitely worth having. I gave the Red Cross some of my blood about 2 weeks later, and have sent in my form to the Rare Blood Club. It's so nice to know my blood is really of some use to someone besides myself!

And now, the most recent issue has Ursula LeGuin's remarks about SF. I write SF, though I'm not yet good enough to buy, and my aim is to produce *good* SF. My husband, however, is the "arrogant" sort who believes that SF is the junk you read when you come home tired from work. He's pounded the image of SF as trash into my head so often I wonder occasionally if I'm seeing more in it than there actually is. Thank heaven for Ms. LeGuin's article. She's just about the only author he will grant does write good literature in the field (he even buys her books IN HARDBACK), and even though I don't think his basic opinion has changed, it's given him something to consider. And it's relieved the pressure for mediocrity from me, whether I finally do write first-class stories or not.

I was also shocked to find myself reading the science article on black holes. Even though I'm the sort of person whose eyes glaze at numbers of any sort (including phone and license!) and who treats formulas like man-eating plants, I just flew through Dr. Pournelle's clear presentation.

Lastly, thanks for putting Alter in Galaxy. I would have missed him.

(Mrs.) Henye Meyer

66 Addington Rd.
Brookline, Mass. 02146

*And thank* you!

Dear James Baen,

I have just finished reading Le Guin's article in the Dec. issue of *Galaxy*. Of all the interesting articles you have printed in the Forum, this is the most provocative and stimulating one. I cannot agree with Le Guin more. Her points are well made



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and touch on something that I have thought of writing to you about several times. The point she stressed was the chance, at last, to get intelligent criticism, from people trained to do it. Damon Knight is the only peson inside the field to do a good job of intelligent criticism. Since he quit there has been a vacuum which has not been filled, either inside or outside the field, until recently.

I think you now have a chance to take a very bold step with *Galaxy*. If you look at all science fiction magazines you will find reviewers, no critics. The magazines are, for all intents and purposes, closed doors to the Academe, with the possible exception of this article by Le Guin. There's been a hell of a lot of talk about the sudden profusion of high school and college courses in S.F. and the methods of teaching such courses, but beyond that there is silence. Why not approach, say, Darko Suvin to do a bimonthly or even quarterly critique for Galaxy? It would put Galaxy out in front by a mile as a magazine seriously interested in the future of the genre and its expansion.

It would also serve to broaden readers' perspectives and appreciation of science fiction. The interchange can only be beneficial to all of us, writers and readers alike.

As Le Guin points out there are alot of walls up, which for an open, supposedly unlimited field is hypocritical.

I know Galaxy is already a little cramped, but it can't hurt and it can serve to open doors and least knock on walls. Shevek did it, why not Galaxy?

All the best,
Nicholas Grimshawe

170 East Keith Rd.,
Apt 208, North Vancouver,
B.C., Canada, V7L 1V2

Dear Mr. Baen:

It is with great regret that I read of the "demise" of *IF* in the Dec. '74 issue. Since taking out my subscription in January 1972 *If* has provided many hours of reading pleasure in its particular vein. The controlled "hard-science" approach of *Galaxy* relative to *If* has much to offer but variety is the spice of life. I would like to offer a few comments on the elements of *If* which I feel should be carried over and given prominent billing in the *Galaxy-If* fusion.

One of the first things that comes to mind is the cover art of Rick Sternbach. His "Starbow" cover for the April 1974 issue was breathtaking and one of the most beautiful covers I've seen in several years. A painting like that is worth making into a poster cum Frank Frazetta. This cover along with the Dec. 1974 cover have convinced me that Sternbach has the potential to rank with Freas and Gaughan with continued experience. Other readers will recognize his talent only if exposure of his work is continued. I certainly hope that he will be contracted by the new magazine for his art work which has provided much visual pleasure so far.

I am glad that Geis' "The Alien Viewpoint" will be continued. Although much of what he says seems like nonsense at times, it's refreshing to hear him expound. One column I did fervently agree with was the Dec. one, where among other things he cited Gene Wolfe as an example of the rising wave of "academic SF." Since I am a double major in college in Chemistry and Literature I straddle the fence of two different worlds of college viewpoint. After reading Wolfe's "The Fifth Head of Cerberus," "The Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories," and "The Death of Dr. Island" I am amazed at the popular support these stories have received in Hugo balloting and I was especially appalled at Wolfe's Nebula for "The Death of Dr. Island." After slogging through stories like these what is one left with? From the "hard-science" point of view nothing is gained in interpretation and from a symbolic literary angle, the ideas that Wolfe is attempting to express are so obscure as to become unimportant.

While I'm not advocating the extreme "Get SF out of the college and back into the gutter where it belongs" vein of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought, some allowance has to be made for the reader. I felt cheated of my time after reading the Wolfe stories. A strong writing talent has written himself into a corner inaccessible to most except those willing to stop and pick apart levels of meaning. The writer shouldn't force his reader to do work worthy of a doctoral thesis to get the crux of meaning. Such stories will not be mulled over by an audience waiting to hear what writers such as Wolfe have to say.

Getting back to items that should be included in the new magazine, I hope you will continue publishing the work of Colin Kapp. His recent serials for *If*, *Patterns of Chaos* and *The Wizard of Anharitte* had me suspended for weeks waiting between installments. Few SF writers of this decade have matched Kapp's vividness. While stories about exotic forms of planetary exploration such as Anderson's "Call Me Joe" and Clement's *Mission of Gravity* have been seen before, Kapp's "Mephisto and the Ion Explorer" gave an approach which showed originality and work on the author's part. His is a talent that I hope won't be neglected by you in the future.

Well, that's about it. Best of luck to you with your combination magazine. I'll be avidly following its progress and hoping for the best.

Sincerely yours,
William B. Catus III

5252 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear Sir,

Like William J. Denholm III in your September issue, I have been very much impressed with the recent rise in quality in *Galaxy* and *If* under your editorship. As a member of Mensa I should have enough intelligence to appreciate good material.

If I may refer further to the September issue so long after—it is new here—the story "Incident" by Rex and Elizabeth Levie, re the Cain and Abel theme seems to have reversed its polarities. In the Biblical story, Abel was the hunter and/or herdsman, and his gifts were flesh, not fruit, while Cain's vegetable products were not acceptable sacrifices, whence he raged and slew Abel. On the broader field, we find the cultivators ousting and killing the hunters, who, contrary to "logical" beliefs, were less warlike. In Africa the Hereros suffered thus, and earlier the hunting and gathering Bushmen. (Hunting and gathering normally go together). The maize tribes, e.g.; Iroquois, pursued the "hidden children" like the Mohicans. In New Zealand the kumara cultivating tribes outsted and slaughtered the hunters and gatherers, as in this region. It is significant that the trappers lived on reasonable terms with the Plains Indians, but when the farmers came, war became relentless. Maurice Walsh tried to make out that the meat-eating Highlanders were better warriors than the oat-fed Lowlanders, but in the Montrose campaigns, the sudden dashes were no match for the dour and persistent fighters they found themselves up against. It is something like persistent and dangerous buffalo against sudden but lazy lions.

It is those beliefs which seem most self-evident that usually most need questioning and research into what actually happens. In science fiction particularly, the views that most need illustrating in fictional form are unusual insights from reality, rather than the already shopworn "obvious." The "obvious" usually tells more about a prevailing mental atmosphere than about reality. —Which is why I find the assumptions of that story out of tune with a fresh wind which is already blowing in Science Fiction. Isn't this supposed to be the time for a high point in the S.F. cycle? Anyway, carry on with the good work.

Yours cordially,
Alistair M. Isdale

P.O. Box 79,
THAMES
New Zealand

*"Incident" directed itself not to the perennial conflict between agrarian and nomad*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*peoples but to much earlier types of hominids—the inventors of the essentially carnivorous tool-as-weapon versus the essentially herbivorous inventors of the tool-as-digger/chopper. The progeny of the former still exist (us) while the latter group is of interest solely to the anthropaleontologists. . .*

Dear gentleperson,

The only comparable sadness I can remember in my many years of reading SF magazines is the discontinuance of *Venture*, which for all its virtues, lasted less than a year. I am probably one of the few people around who have read every single one of the 175 issues of *IF* and thus can fully appreciate what is now lost. I first started reading SF mags when I was ten in 1956, but didn't discover *IF* until 1958. Poking through the piles of junk at a local (Painesville Ohio—according to my myth Harlan Ellison's hometown as well) junk store I discovered several back years of *IF* and *GALAXY* and set out to find the rest. In those days, before real collectors had made it impossible, a fourteen year old boy could still do this. Although *IF* had its goodly number of failures (particularly the years before your current editorship) which almost caused me to stop buying, in general its high quality often made the entire field bearable.

I don't know how this decision was reached, but I wish that those of us who have provided the solid core of SF buyers over the years (I have probably bought 90% of all major pb publishers lists and all non-reprint mags for fifteen years) could have been consulted about this step. I have always resisted subscribing, since I have felt that my purchases would insure at least one local outlet, but certainly I would have been willing to support some kind of substaining subscription if that catagory were necessary. Those of us in the solid core will buy at virtually any price.

Sincerely,
Walter Milliken

26530 Parkside Dr.
Hayward, Ca. 94542


Galaxy

GALAXY/IF S-F MART
235 East 45 Street
New York N Y 10017

50¢ per word per issue (including name and address) or 3 issues $1.00 per word. 10-word minimum. Payment with order.

if

**BOOKS AND MAGAZINES**

ALL BOOKS ADVERTISED in this issue by Ballantine, DAW, other publishers available, postage free, from: T-K GRAPHICS, Department "G", P.O. Box 1951, Baltimore, Maryland 21203. Giant catalog free.

LOGIC NEWSLETTERS — Logic design and construction. Sample copy $1.00. LOGIC NEWSLETTER, POB 252, Waldwick, New Jersey 07463.

FREE sample copy. SIGNS Magazine, Box 1303, Longview, Washington 98632.

STARSPEAK — A Fantasy/SF quarterly. $1.00— Croft, 1718 Colina, Glendale, Calif. 91208.

UNIVERSE — the first monthly American nonfiction journal of science fiction and fantasy. Features, columns, articles, plus reviews of every new science fiction or fantasy book published. Detailed information available for a stamped self-addressed envelope. Rt. 3, Box 42, Union, Miss. 39365.

EDEN II, provocative SF by Edd Doerr, $1.95, Aquarius Press, 3018 Aquarius Ave., Silver Spring, Maryland 20906.

BOOK AND MAGAZINE READERS! Send wants to: S & S Books, G-8, 80 North Wilder, St. Paul, Minn. 55104.

WANTED TO BUY — All issues of science fiction and fantasy magazines from 1926 to 1965. Harry Bennett, 6763 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA. 90028.




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATED CATALOG of SF-Fantasy books. Over 2,000 titles listed. Send 25 cents for one, $1.00 for next 4, or $2.00 for four consecutive catalogs plus Silverberg's "Dying Inside" a $6.95 publisher's edition SF book. Send to: Purple Unicorn Books, 4532-G2 London Road, Duluth, Minn. 55804.

WANTED: Collections of comics, SF and fantasy paperbacks, hardbounds, pulps and magazines. Graham Holroyd, 20 Old Farm Circle, Pittsford, New York 14534.

SF-FANTASY BOOKLISTS. RED DEVIL BOOKS, 218½-G East 2nd Street, Duluth, Minn. 55805.

FANTOMES—SF, Fantasy, pulps, fanzines, out-of-print titles. Free catalog: Fantomes, 3952 West Dundee Road, Northbrook, Ill. 60062.

FOR SALE: USED Science Fiction paperback books. Lists 25 cents refundable. Horse Schmid, 15489 Dixie, Detroit, Mich. 48239.

Out of print. Send wants. Bookdealer, Dept. GF, 39 North Browning Ave., Tenafly, N.J. 07670.

Poetry Market Newsletter — Send self-addressed envelope for information: Minotaur, Box 687A, Eagle River, Alaska 99577.

## MISCELLANEOUS

INNER KNOWLEDGE changes life. Learn Mind control—"MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS— Sages' Secrets." Send $9.99, M.O. High Priestess ZORA, S.A.S.L. Meditation Ashram, P.O. Box 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201. (Dept. G)

"Ye pray amiss", said Jesus. Pray properly—receive answers. Send $4.79 M.O. "PRAYER IS A SCIENCE" S.A.S.L., P.O. Box 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201. (Dept. G)

STELLAR CONQUEST: Absorbing game of space-faring societies in conflict. 2-4 imaginative adults explore planets; develop super-technologies, industrialize; wage warship combat. 6 color plastic star map, 400 ship counters, and more. If S-F, STAR TREK, or games intrigue you, you'll always regret missing this. $8 US from: METAGAMING CONCEPTS, Box 15346-HB, Austin, Texas 78761 (10¢ for brochure).

1975 WORLD SF CONVENTION, Melbourne — "Hugo" voting, membership, travel info. — write Fred Patten, 11863 West Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, Calif. 90230.

Have you always wanted to write a short story or novel, but just couldn't get started? For $3.00, we will send you an original developed plot and a story outline. The rest is up to you. Two for $5.00. Specify type of story and send correct amount to: Danner Services, Box 37071, Cincinnati, Ohio 45222.

OLD TIME Food Shortage Recipies and Menus, Vegetarian or Regular. Send $3.79 M.O., Home Economics Dept., S.A.S.L., P.O. Box 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201. (Dept. G)

SAVE MONEY! Fix your own TV. Technician tells how. Free information: Watson, 23142 Columbus—G1, Warren, Mich. 48089.

DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE DREAMING? I will Analyze your dreams and tell you. Send $3.00 with dream to Dr. Stephen H. Hall, 427 North Canon Drive, Suite 201, Beverly Hills, California 90210.

FABULOUS FLYING STARS, Japanese martial arts target practice as seen on Kung Fu. $3.00 (four or more 20% off), SHURIKEN, 144 West 19 St., NY, NY 10011.

LUCKY GAMBLING through psychic power. Tested scientific method. Free details, M G L, Box 1047-G, West Sacramento, Calif. 95691.

DATES GALORE! Meet exciting singles anywhere. Free application: DATELINE, Alpha, Ohio 45301.

We guarantee to publish your short story or article in 12 months. Free details. R-Way Dist. Inc., 12 South Summit Ave., Gaithersburg, Md. 20760.

JEWELERS! HOBBYISTS! Genuine highest-quality cut & polished Southwestern tourquoise stones available in retail and bulk. Stones range in size from two to two-hundred carats. Retail prices: Morenci, $1.00/carat; Bisbee, $1.25/carat; Royston, $0.80/carat. Wholesale prices negotiable. To order or for further information write: S. Kramer, PO Box 569, Woodstock, N.Y. 12498

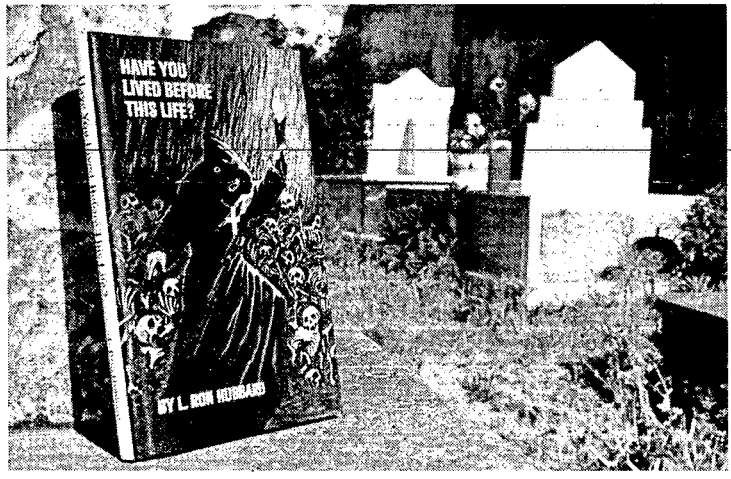
## MAIL ORDER ACTION

DIRECT ACTION AT LOW COST—in GALAXY S-F MART. 50 cents per word per issue or $1.00 per word for three issues. More than 50,000 potential customers. Classified ads in GALAXY S-F MART bring results! Write S-F Mart, Galaxy/ 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# LIFE BEYOND THIS WORLD!




This fantastic book will reveal Science Fiction drawn from true life experiences and the possibility of your life on another planet. Read HAVE YOU LIVED BEFORE THIS LIFE? by L. Ron Hubbard and discover the future in your own past.

**PAST LIVES CAN BE REMEMBERED!**

If you think you can't remember your past lives, this book will change your mind. Here are actual case histories of ordinary people who became able to remember their past lives and how it affected them. You can remember them too! Get this book TODAY!

**Send $4.00 to:**

**Bookstore GY-I**
**Founding Church**
**of Scientology**
**1812 19th St. N.W.**
**Washington, DC 20009**

Your copy shipped immediately. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Scientology is an applied religious philosophy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# READ IT SLOWLY.

You'll want to. It's that good . . . it's The Hugo Winners: 23 speculative fiction stories that have won the science fiction equivalent of the Oscar —Arthur C. Clarke's superb story, "The Star," Jack Vance's classic, "The Dragon Masters," and Poul Anderson's award-winner, "No Truce With Kings," plus 20 more.

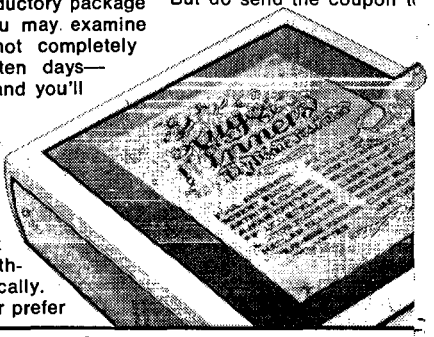
This fabulous 864-page anthology of speculative fiction sells for $15.45 in the original publisher's edition. It's yours, if you wish, as one of 4 books for just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling) when you join The Science Fiction Book Club.

**Here's how the Club works:**

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your introductory package of four books for just 10¢. You may examine them in your home, and if not completely satisfied, return them within ten days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified. You will have at least ten days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to decide within 10 days, and receive a Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. Most Selections cost $1.98 plus shipping and handling. Alternates and selections are slightly higher, sometimes less than Publisher's Edition prices. But do send the coupon today.



## ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢ with membership

**Science Fiction Book Club** 45-S131

Dept. GR-024, Garden City, New York 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____
Please print

Address _____ Apt. ____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

6221. **The Foundation Trilogy.** By Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. An SF classic. Comb. Price $16.85

8037. **Again, Dangerous Visions.** Harlan Ellison, ed. Short stories and novels, 46 in all. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $12.95

3616. **Fire Time.** By Poul Anderson. Terrific suspense — as a young spaceman must decide who will live, who will die on a tiny planet on the verge of cosmic disaster. Pub. ed. $5.95

2782. **The 1974 Annual World's Best S.F.** Donald A. Wollheim, ed. Ten novellas, short stories: Ellison's Hugo Award-winning **The Deathbird**, plus top Simak, Sheckley, Pohl. Special Edition.

0067. **The Dispo** By Ursula K. Le A lone scientis caught in a col between two pl tries desperate unite them. Pul ed. $7.95

8532. **The Hugo Winners, Vol. I & II.** Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

6023. **The Gods Themselves.** By Isaac Asimov. The master's first novel in 15 years . . . and worth the wait for a fabulous trip to the year 3000. Pub. ed. $5.95

3624. **Approaching Oblivion.** By Harlan Ellison. Eleven mind-spinning stories in the multi-award winner's new anthology — explicit scenes, language exploring new and unfathomed areas of the future. Pub. ed. $7.95

1297. **Before the Golden Age.** Isaac Asimov, ed. 26 classic stories of the 1930s, from vintage SF pulps, now in one huge volume. Pub. ed. $16.95

1032. **Rendezvous with Rama.** By Arthur C. Clarke. Hugo and Nebula Award Winner. Dazzling visionary novel of a self-contained world in space. Pub. ed. $6.95

3632. **The Deathworld Trilogy.** By Harry Harrison. On 3 amazing planets interplanetary adventurer Jason dinAlt gambles his life against different lethal environments. Special Edition.

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.

HOWARD L LYDICK
538 ROBARY DR
RICHARDSON TX 75080

LICENSED TO GARY NORRIS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED